



# Intelligence

state of the art threat assessment

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## Upcoming Events

### Self-Directed Violence Risk Triage Workshop

Virtual Attendance via Zoom  
17 June 2020

### Violence Risk Triage Workshop

Virtual Attendance via Zoom  
15 July 2020

### Victim Safety Planning Workshop

Virtual Attendance via Zoom  
19 August 2020

### HCR-20 V3 Workshop

Virtual Attendance via Zoom  
14-15 September 2020

## Editor's Note



about how this pandemic has led mental health and forensic services to move from in-person to online. Also in this issue, Dr. Stephen Hart provides a practice update about how threat assessment professionals can continue to provide threat assessment services at a distance.

As always, *Intelligence* will keep you up to date with recent advances in threat assessment from around the globe through knowledge and experiences shared by world-leading experts.

First and foremost, we wanted to thank all the first responders who have been putting themselves at increased risk by supporting everyone else. We also hope that this Newsletter finds you, your colleagues, and your families as healthy and happy as possible during this challenging time.

We wanted this issue to focus on addressing the implications of COVID-19 for threat assessment professionals and providing you with support and resources to continue the important work that you do.

In this issue, Dr. Patricia Zapf provides a practice update

In addition, we have several special announcements. First, Protect International has moved from in-person to on-line workshops to respect COVID-19 social distancing and travel guidelines. Second, we are happy to introduce you to Thread of Evidence, a Forensic Radio Show and Podcast that plays on America Out Loud, hosted by Dr. Joni Johnston and Dr. Ron Martinelli.

We hope *Intelligence* will continue to provide a forum for you to share and develop your expertise in threat assessment during this challenging time. We encourage you to contribute and provide feedback.

Sincerely,  
Kelly A. Watt, PhD  
Director and Threat Assessment Specialist at Protect International Risk and Safety Services

# Pushing the Ball Forward, Faster: Using the COVID-19 Pandemic to Expand Forensic Telehealth

There is no doubt that the world has changed for everyone over the last few months. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused massive disruption in almost every aspect of life and has forced most individuals and organizations, including threat assessment professionals, to shift, change, or adapt operations quickly to maintain service provision. Threat assessment professionals may benefit from looking to mental health and forensic services to see how these services have been adapting to inform their own work.

Moving in-person services toward alternative formats—including online telehealth services—has become an important component in trying to offer consistent mental health and forensic services and the current pandemic has simply ignited the already growing demand for telehealth services in forensic psychology. While some organizations had been slower to respond than others to this increasing need pre-pandemic, the current situation has required many to make this important move towards expanded telehealth services in short order. National and international organizations—such as the American and Canadian Psychological Associations—offer [guidelines for internet-based therapy](#) and teletherapy and others provide [resources and training](#) in digital therapy, but these are not specific to the forensic domain.

A small but growing pre-pandemic literature provides some information regarding the implementation and evaluation of videoconferencing and digital technologies for forensic evaluation (e.g., [Adjorlolo & Chan, 2015](#); [Luxton & Niemi, 2019](#); [Sales, McSweeney, Saleem, & Khalifa, 2017](#)). In addition to providing an overview of recent research examining the use of videoconferencing in forensic competency assessment, [Luxton, Lexcen and McIntyre \(2019\)](#) also include recommendations for implementing forensic videoconferencing programs—including a needs and readiness assessment, selection and installation of equipment and infrastructure, legal review



and review of policies and procedures, and training and coordination considerations. Each of these areas should be reviewed and carefully considered when making the transition to or adding telehealth services.

For any service, organization, or threat assessment professional making the transition from in-person to online, there will undoubtedly be bumps along the way and the process will not always be a smooth one. Nevertheless, if the current pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we must be able to think flexibly about the way in which we provide services and have the adaptability to be able to pivot quickly in crises. Perhaps the biggest silver lining to the current pandemic is that we have pushed the ball forward faster than ever towards the much-needed expansion of telehealth services within the forensic domain.

*Patricia A. Zapf, PhD,  
Palo Alto University*

## Upcoming Webinars

### CONCEPT and Protect International “Wednesday Webinar” Series

**Violence Risk/Threat Assessment Case Illustrations:  
Violence in Healthcare**  
9 September 2020

**Violence Risk/Threat Assessment Case Illustrations:  
Higher Education**  
7 October 2020

**Violence Risk/Threat Assessment Case Illustrations:  
Law Enforcement**  
4 November 2020

[Learn more ...](#)

## Threat Assessment at a Distance: Could You, Should You?

The Practice Update by Dr. Patricia Zapf discusses the use of teleconferencing (TC) and videoconferencing (VC) technology to conduct forensic mental health evaluations. She points out that this is not a new issue, although it is a currently hot topic in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. But what about the use of TC/VC by threat assessment professionals more specifically? Although there is no systematic evidence base, this topic has been touched on in several studies. For example, [Batastini et al. \(2019\)](#) surveyed a sample of 156 forensic mental health professionals, of whom 35% indicated they had some limited experience conducting evaluations using TC/VC; the single most common type of evaluation was violence risk assessment. This is consistent with our experience here at Protect International. We have conducted threat assessments by VC several times over the years; and we have also conducted evaluations where some people (e.g., support persons or legal representatives) attended by TC. This includes evaluations conducted in workplace, educational, legal, and correctional contexts. I have heard similar accounts from colleagues in Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Despite the fact that, collectively, threat assessment professionals have considerable experience working by TC/VC, many concerns about doing so are still expressed by individual evaluators, professional associations, attorneys, and judges. I had the opportunity recently to discuss this with

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Dr. Michelle Guyton and Dr. Alexander Millkey of the [Northwest Forensic Institute](#) in Portland, Oregon. Michelle and Alex have been conducting a range of forensic evaluations by VC for years, and they are presenting a webinar on this very topic later this week for the Institute of Law, Psychiatry, and Public Policy at the University of Virginia. When we were talking, they pointed out that



professionals have been delivering services and that courts, review boards, and tribunals have been conducting hearings by TC/VC for decades. Both empirical research and anecdotal experience suggest that most of the concerns about TC/VC are not a problem in reality. Relevant security and privacy challenges can be successfully overcome. Evaluatees can handle the technical challenges of using a telephone to receive a call or using a laptop to participate in an evaluation by Zoom, Doxy Me, etc. Evaluatees establish and maintain rapport

with evaluators by TC/VC as easily as they do in face-to-face evaluations. Most importantly, VC – but not TC – allows evaluators to directly observe and interact with evaluatees in a manner that approaches that of face-to-face evaluations. Michelle and Alex think that the biggest obstacle to the effective use of TC/VC is actually lack of personal exposure to and experience with conducting evaluations by TC/VC on the part of evaluators – something that is easily remedied.

In conclusion, there are no obvious legal, professional, or practical reasons why threat assessment professionals cannot deliver services by TC/VC – and especially by VC – when deemed appropriate and acceptable by the parties involved. As Michelle and Alex recommend, if you are concerned or curious about whether and how to proceed with evaluation by TC/VA, start by consulting with colleagues to look for guidance concerning relevant law, policy, and practice. I will add that if you are one of those colleagues who has relevant knowledge or experience, please share it with others: consider hosting a webinar or submitting an article for a newsletter (like *Intelligence*) or a professional journal (like the *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*).

*Stephen D. Hart, PhD, Protect International Risk and Safety Services Inc.*

## Upcoming Virtual Workshops 2020

Protect International is pleased to announce that we are offering ten upcoming Virtual Workshops in 2020 which you can attend via Zoom! We wanted to provide many options for on-line workshops to respect COVID-19 social distancing and travel guidelines. This means that participants can attend these live workshops from work or home – anywhere with an internet connection!



## Introducing Thread of Evidence: A Forensic Radio Show and Podcast Featuring a Forensic Psychologist and Criminologist



Watch Dr. Joni Johnston, a clinical/forensic psychologist and private investigator and Dr. Ron Martinelli, a forensic criminologist and investigator, tackle a host of forensic topics as they interview top experts in forensic science. The show airs weekly on Wednesday at 9:00 p.m. Eastern time on America Out Loud, an independent platform that has 1.35 million monthly viewers, and is also available on most podcast platforms.

This show is an opportunity to hear from a variety of disciplines and addresses many topics relevant to threat assessment professionals, such as expert witness testimony, domestic terrorism, and serial stalkers. Recent topics have included attorney Casey Gwinn talking about Domestic Violence Under Quarantine, Dr. Kelly Watt discussing Interviewing for Violence Risk, and genetic genealogist Cece Moore who has helped solve 50 cold cases through DNA.

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