

VENTURA COUNTY CHAPTER  
www.vc-camft.org  
P. O. Box 373, Camarillo, CA 93011

# The Ventura County Communicator

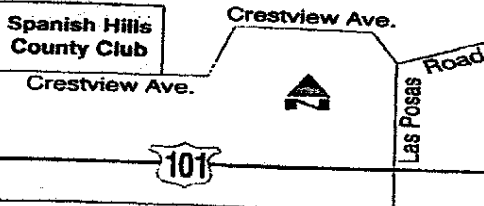
## September Meeting

**DATE:** Friday, September 9, 2005  
**TIME:** Lunch 11:30am-1:30 pm  
(11:15 AM check-in)  
**LOCATION:** Spanish Hills Country Club  
999 Crestview Ave. Camarillo  
**COST:** \$16 prepaid members and standing  
reservations; \$18 prepaid non-members; \$18 at  
the door, if reserved by previous Monday; \$20 no  
reservation.  
**RSVP/CANCELLATION:** Send check to P.O. Box 373,  
Camarillo, CA 93011 by Friday, September 2 or  
call (805) 655-5626 by Monday, September 5.  
**PROGRAM:** Dan Jordan, Ph.D. will speak on *The  
Clinician and Social Justice*  
*(Editor's note: This is probably the most important  
issue facing our profession during this time in  
history. Don't miss this one!)*

## October Meeting

**DATE:** Friday, October 14, 2005  
**TIME:** Lunch 11:30am-1:30 pm  
(11:15 AM check-in)  
**LOCATION:** Spanish Hills Country Club  
999 Crestview Ave, Camarillo  
**COST:** \$16 prepaid members and standing reser-  
vations; \$18 prepaid non-members; \$18 at the  
door, if reserved by previous Monday; \$20 no  
reservation.  
**RSVP/CANCELLATION:** Send check to P.O. Box 373,  
Camarillo, CA 93011 by Fri., October 7 or call  
(805) 655-5625 by Mon., October 10.  
**PROGRAM:** Rebecca Reyes, M.D. - Female Psychi-  
atric Disorders

VC-CAMFT Meeting Location  
Spanish Hills Country Club  
999 Crestview Ave.  
Camarillo, CA 93010



## So What Do Supervised Visitation Monitors Do?

By Heidi Elowitz

That is a question I get asked when I tell people my title, even when I'm speaking to someone in the Social Services or Mental Health field. Supervised Visitation Monitors are professionally trained individuals who are hired to supervise visits between non-custodial parents and their children when it has been court-ordered. Supervised Visitation may be ordered by the court for a number of different reasons: the non-custodial parent has been accused of physical abuse of a child, sexual abuse of a child, domestic violence—particularly if witnessed by a child, substance abuse, mental illness, flight risk, or estrangement. If the case is seen as mild, the court will normally call for Monitored or Supervised Visitation, where the monitor keeps the visiting parent and children within vision and hearing range during the visit, makes sure that no inappropriate or dangerous behavior occurs, and documents the events of the visit for attorneys and the court. In cases which are more severe, the court can order Therapeutic or Facilitated



Visitation. Then a licensed therapist helps to facilitate strained communication and interaction between the parent and children in order to make the visit go more smoothly and comfortably.

Monitors can meet both parties at an off-site location such as a park, mall, restaurant, children's play area, beach, either parties' home, or at an office location, depending on what the court order calls for. Monitors are sometimes required to pick children up at a specific point and transport them to and from custodial and non-custodial parties. Monitors must

(continued on page 6)

*(Continued from Cover)*

## So What Do Supervised Visitation Monitors Do?

blend in and be unobtrusive during the visit so as not to interfere in the relationship and, hopefully, the bonding taking place between parent and child, and they must be personable enough to maintain good working relationships with both parents as well as the minors involved, who are truly the clients. Monitors must pay constant attention to verbal communication and body language to ensure that all of the behavioral guidelines of supervised visitation are adhered to during visitation. This includes no negative talk about the custodial party, the reasons for the supervised visits, the custody and court proceedings, statements that are negative or hurtful toward the child, or behavior that is confrontational toward the monitor. Monitors are frequently asked to submit declarations for the court and occasionally to appear in court and testify.

When I was little and people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I never said "A Supervised Visitation Monitor." I didn't even hear the term until five years ago when I began working at Interface Children Family Services as an Intake Specialist as I was graduating from my Marriage and Family Therapy program at California Lutheran University. I was an Intake Specialist for two years. It included performing the intake procedures for the Supervised Visitation Program. When a training opportunity came around, I took the course and became certified by Interface as a monitor. At the time we were really the only agency in the county providing that service. In Los Angeles County it is often performed

by off-duty or retired sheriff's deputies. For several years I have also worked as a monitor in private practice everywhere from the San Fernando Valley to Santa Barbara County. I have worked with all populations from sexual offenders to substance abusers to those classified as chronically mentally ill.

People always say my job sounds scary or it must be hard. I actually have found it to be a great niche for me and very much the opposite of how others perceive it. Let me explain. I have worked as a marriage and family therapist and a psychologist assistant as I pursue my PhD in Clinical Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute during the same time I have been working as a monitor. Very often people present to counseling because someone else has given them an ultimatum (parent, spouse, partner). Sometimes people come to complain or for companionship or because they think the therapist is going to fix everything for them. Supervised Visitation is not the same dynamic as therapy of course. The interesting aspect of it is that no parent is ordered that they *must* see their children; only that they must do it *that way* if they want to have contact with them. Supervised visitation can be a very invasive experience. It limits personal privacy, is costly, and involves inconvenient paperwork. Therefore, any parent who chooses to proceed anyway is going to be highly motivated to be on their best behavior and to do a good job. Most parents are very motivated to do well because they want to get off of monitored visitation and return to a normal lifestyle with their children. I



can honestly say that I have only had five clients in the last five years who have been difficult enough that termination has been necessary. A client a year is pretty good odds in the mental health field! Occasionally I have a custodial parent who thinks I'm on their ex's side because that is who I spend more time with, or a visiting parent who resents being "babysat." More often the custodial parent realizes I'm there to keep their child safe and the visiting parent knows they wouldn't be seeing their child at all without me there. Mostly I get to work with incredibly nice families that are trying to do the right thing for their kids. At my last visit a little girl was saying grace before her birthday lunch with her sister, father, and paternal grandparents, and said "Thank you for my monitor so I get to see my Daddy." A moment like that makes me want to always do this job, no matter what kind of license or degree I end up getting someday.

*Heidi Elowitch, M.S. is a Marriage and Family Therapist Intern and Psychologist Assistant on staff at Interface Children Family Services and interning at Clinicas Del Camino Real, Inc. She is in private practice as a Supervised Visitation Monitor. She is the volunteer facilitator for the Tri-Counties Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis Support Group.*



# The Conejo Connection

A Quarterly Publication of the Conejo Valley Mental Health Professional's Organization

Volume 4, Issue 2

Spring, 2005

## From the Editor Cynthia Horack, MFT

Here we are again, and it finally feels like maybe Spring is back! If you haven't rejoined for 2005, you probably aren't reading this newsletter... but if you are reading it and haven't joined, please do so today! It's too late to get into the membership directory, but we are working on a website, and we can add new members to the website directory as they join. Why should you join? For one thing, we've been able to keep membership fees to a minimum, thanks to sponsorship from several pharmaceutical companies. That also helps to keep our meeting costs down. Other reasons to join:

**Inexpensive advertising:** A 30 word classified ad is only \$10 for members (\$20 for non-members) and each additional word is only 10 cents. A 1/6 page display ad is only \$25 for members; \$35 for non-members. You can advertise office space, intern positions, services—anything that is legal!

**Visibility:** Members can publish articles in the newsletter on professional topics to gain exposure and get your name in front of other professionals who may find your services valuable. Members may inquire about giving a presentation on a topic of professional interest.

**CEUs:** Reduced rates to members for local continuing education lunches and programs, good toward renewing your license.

**Multidisciplinary:** Equal membership is offered to all licensed/prelicensed mental health professionals regardless of discipline, reflecting real patterns of professional referral in the community.

**Local:** Our local membership base reflects how most client referrals are local.

**Inexpensive:** What other organization can you join for only \$40.00 a year and still get all these benefits?

We invite you to pass this newsletter on to colleagues, to invite them to meetings and to join our membership.

Conejo Valley Mental Health Professional Associations exists to serve all mental health professionals not only in the Conejo Valley, but also in neighboring communities, such as Ventura, Oxnard, Simi Valley, the San Fernando Valley and more. We are composed of MFT's, LCSW's, Clinical Psychologists, Psychiatrists and affiliated professionals such as psychiatric nurses.

We are a volunteer organization—our board is made up of dedicated professionals who contribute their time to make this a worthwhile endeavor. We always extend the invitation to join us at our monthly executive committee meetings, the first Friday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at the Los Robles East facility—the old Charter Hospital in Westlake Village. You can call on anyone of us for more information, directions, or just to confirm a meeting time. The committee chairs are listed on the page 5 of this newsletter.

Continued on page 3

## Calendar of Events

June 17th:  
Johanna Lessner, Ph.D., LCSW:  
Eating Disorders

September 23rd:  
State of Mental Health

November 18: Tentative topic:  
Autism, speaker to be announced

Tentative Meeting Dates for 2006:

January 27th  
March 24th  
June 23rd  
September 15th  
November 17th

Meeting dates are subject to availability of speakers and the facility. Dates and speakers are subject to change due to circumstances beyond our control.

Board Meetings are the first Friday of each month at 9:00 a.m. at Los Robles East facility located at 153 Via Merida, Westlake Village in the conference room just past the lobby. All are welcome!

## In This Issue:

<u>Title</u>	<u>Page</u>
Calendar of Events	1
<b>ARTICLES:</b>	
Recognizing and Treating Postpartum Depression	2
So What Do Supervised Visitation Monitors Do?	4
Independent Medical Review: A Slingshot in Your Patient's Battle with the Goliath of Managed Care	6
Classified Ads	5
Executive Committee Contacts	5
Dress Code/Meeting Policy	5

## So What Do Supervised Visitation Monitors Do?

Heidi Elowitch, M.S.



**T**hat is a question I get asked more often than not when I tell people

my title, even when I'm speaking to someone in the Social Services or Mental Health field. So I thought I'd write a little article to tell you about one of the less well-known Mental Health Professions here in the Conejo Valley and elsewhere. Supervised Visitation Monitors are professionally trained individuals who are hired to supervise visits between non-custodial parents and their child or children when it has been court-ordered. Supervised Visitation may be ordered by the court for a number of different reasons, including alleged or convicted physical abuse of a child, sexual abuse of a child, domestic violence—particularly if witnessed by a child, substance abuse, mental illness, flight risk, or estrangement. If the case is seen as mild, the court will normally call for Monitored or Supervised Visitation, where the monitor keeps the visiting parent and children within vision and hearing range at all times during the visit, makes sure that no inappropriate or dangerous behavior occurs, and documents the events of the visit for attorneys and the court. In cases that are more severe, the court can order Therapeutic or Facilitated Visitation, where a licensed therapist helps to facilitate strained communication and interaction between the parent and children in order to make the visit go more smoothly and comfortably.

Monitors can meet both parties at an off-site location such as a park, mall, restaurant, children's play area, beach, either parties home, or at an office location, depending on what the court order calls for. Monitors are sometimes required to pick children up at a specific point and transport them to and from custodial and non-custodial parties. Monitors must blend in and be unobtrusive during the visit so as not to interfere in the relationship and bonding taking place between parent and child, but must be personable enough to maintain good working relationships with both parties as well as the minors involved, who are truly the clients. Monitors must pay constant attention to verbal com-

munication and body language to ensure that all of the behavioral guidelines of supervised visitation are adhered to during visitation. This includes no negative talk about the custodial party, the reasons for the

supervised visits, the custody and court proceedings, statements that are negative or hurtful toward the child, or behavior that is confrontational toward the monitor. Monitors are frequently asked to submit declarations for the court and occasionally to appear in court and testify.

When I was little and people asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I never said "A Supervised Visitation Monitor." I didn't even hear the term until five years ago when I began working at Interface Children Family Services as an Intake Specialist as I was graduating from my Marriage and Family Therapy program at California Lutheran University. I did that job for two years and it included performing the intake procedures for the Supervised Visitation Program. When a training opportunity came around, I took the

course and became certified by Interface as a monitor. At the time we were really the only agency in the county providing that service. In Los Angeles County it is often performed by off-duty or retired sheriff's

deputies. For several years I have also worked as a monitor in private practice everywhere from the San Fernando Valley to Santa Barbara County. I have worked with all populations from sexual offenders to substance abusers to those classified as chronically mentally ill.

People always say my job sounds scary or it must be hard. I actually have found it to be a great niche for me and very much the opposite of how others perceive it. Let me explain. I have worked as a marriage and family therapist and a psychologist assistant as I pursue my PhD in Clinical Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute during the same time I have been working as a monitor. Very often people present to counseling because someone else has given them an ultimatum (parent, spouse, partner). Sometimes people come to complain or for companionship or because they think the therapist is going to fix eve-

rything for them. Supervised Visitation is not the same dynamic as therapy of course. The interesting aspect of it is that no parent is ordered that they *must* see their children; only that they must do it *that way* if they want to have contact with them. Supervised visitation can be a very invasive experience. It limits personal privacy, is costly, and involves inconvenient paperwork. Therefore, any parent who chooses to proceed anyway is going to be highly motivated to be on their best behavior and to do a good job. Most parents are very motivated to do well because they want to get off of monitored visitation and return to a normal lifestyle with their children. I can honestly say that I have only had five clients in the last five years who have been difficult enough that termination has been necessary. A client a year is pretty good odds in the mental health field! Occasionally I have a custodial parent who thinks I'm on their ex's side because that is who I spend more time with, and a visiting parent who resents being "babysat." More often the custodial parent realizes I'm there to keep their child safe

"Supervised visitation can be a very invasive experience. It limits personal privacy, is costly, and involves inconvenient paperwork. Therefore, any parent who chooses to proceed anyway is going to be highly motivated to be on their best behavior and to do a good job."

and the visiting parent knows they wouldn't be seeing their child at

all without me there. Mostly I get to work with incredibly nice families that are trying to do the right thing for their kids. At my last visit a little girl was saying grace before her birthday lunch with her sister, father, and paternal grandparents, and said "Thank you for my monitor so I get to see my Daddy." A moment like that makes me want to always do this job, no matter what kind of license or degree I end up getting someday.

*Heidi Elowitch, M.S. is a Marriage and Family Therapist Intern and Psychologist Assistant on staff at Interface Children Family Services and interning at Clinicas Del Camino Real, Inc., in Private Practice as a Supervised Visitation Monitor. She is the volunteer Facilitator for the Tri-Counties Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis Support Group. Heidi can be reached at (805) 732-9446 or h.gemini@verizon.net*