In this symposium, the role of denial is considered in the context of effective treatment and management of sex offenders. Sexual offenders who are in denial of their offences present many challenges to treatment providers, case managers, and other stakeholders. Recent, somewhat mixed, results from research have suggested denial may not be a criminogenic target for sex offenders. Given the approach and focus of most treatment programs and the pressure from non-treatment staff, clinicians are often pressed to deal with denial in sex offenders even though evidence may suggest problems in doing so. This symposium will outline the issues in dealing with deniers and present a number of alternative ways to address this problem from both treatment and management perspectives.

The three presentations that this symposium comprises are (1) an overview of the state of the research on denial and deniers; (1 & 2) approaches to treating denial, including categorical denial (Marshall, Whetstine-Richel); (3) the implementation and effectively communicating the need for a treatment program for deniers (Landon); and (1 & 2) outcome of various approaches to treating deniers (Marshall, Whetstine-Richel).

Understanding and Treating Denial in Sexual Offenders

Liam E. Marshall, Ph.D., Waypoint Centre for Mental Health Care

This paper reviews the literature on denial in sex offenders and concludes it to not be a criminogenic target. However, despite this growing body of evidence, treatment providers and case managers are often put under pressure to overcome denial in sex offenders. This paper will outline the rationale for, and provide a description of, our various approaches to dealing with sex offender in denial who would otherwise not enter sexual offender treatment. As an example, for more than 14 years we ran a treatment program for categorical deniers and have shown promising results. We have recently completed a second recidivism study and the results of these examinations of recidivism will be reported. In this talk, I will review other attempts to deal with these men, outline our rationale for a categorical deniers program, describe in detail our method for treating men in categorical denial, and present two examinations of recidivism and related issues.
Learning Goals and Objectives:
- Participants will gain an understanding of the role categorical denial plays in the treatment of sexual offenders.
- Attendees will learn the approach necessary to dealing with categorical denial in an effective manner.
- Participants will learn how to translate the knowledge gained from the categorical deniers program, into regular treatment programs for other sexual offenders.
- Participants will learn strategies to determine when denying clients have reached the goals of treatment.
- Participants will develop a better understanding of the empirical research underlying the model of treatment.

Moving Forward: A 14 Week Pilot Program for Sex Offenders who Categorically Deny Their Guilt in the Washington State, Department of Corrections, Sex Offender Treatment and Assessment Programs (SOTAP)

Timothy Whetstine-Richel, Ph.D., Washington State Department of Corrections

This presentation will describe the pilot “Moving Forward” program within the Washington State Department of Correction’s Sex Offender Treatment and Assessment Programs (SOTAP). Moving Forward is an innovative, evidence-informed program designed to address dynamic risk factors in actuarially assessed high-risk incarcerated sex offenders who have been convicted of a sex offense or a crime with a sexual component, but who deny their offense. This presentation will present the Moving Forward treatment model, describe innovations, and present preliminary data from the pilot project to include offender cohort characteristics, dynamic risk factor patterns, and success rates for continued programming. Innovations that will be described, include detailing how “third wave” Acceptance and Commitment Therapy behavioral concepts were incorporated into programming curriculum; describing how a Motivational Interviewing intake approach was used to ground participation in addressing “psychologically meaningful” Stable 2007 risk factors, and finally offer a perspective about how a core treatment dialectic between accountability and compassion/support was balanced while working with offenders in the pilot program.

Learning Goals and Objectives:
- Present a concise epistemological account of therapeutic change for deniers that is grounded in the Risk, Needs, Responsivity framework.
- Detail how a motivational interviewing and values based approach can be used to facilitate participation in mandatory, dynamic risk factor based programming.
• Discuss application of “third wave” Acceptance and Commitment Therapy behavioral treatment principles for sex offense deniers, especially the unifying utility of a functional contextualist behavioral framework.
• Present available data from Moving Forward pilot detailing denier characteristics, DRF patterns, and success at continued programming.
• Discuss how ethical concerns related to compulsory programming are managed.

Culture Change: Developing and Implementing Research Informed Programming for High Risk Sexual Offenders who Categorically Deny within a Corrections-Based System

Jeff Landon, M.S.W., Washington State Department of Corrections

This presentation will discuss and illustrate the challenges and methods for successfully overcoming treatment and non-treatment staff’s long-held beliefs regarding sexual offender’s accountability, empathy and personal responsibility. These are often seen as prerequisites for participation in and successful completion of correctional programming. New approaches to evidence-informed and research-based programming such as the WA DOC’s mandatory Moving Forward deniers program pose distinct challenges to implement within both large and small service delivery systems. Programming such as Moving Forward requires comprehensive efforts, creation of opportunities, and barrier removal in order for practitioner(s) to successfully implement sustainable programming.

This presentation will cover topics such as: how to effectively communicate research and rationale to corrections administrators and/or decision makers, approaches to changing culture both internal to a program and external within an agency and strategies for sustainability and growth.

Learning Goals and Objectives
• Discussion of systems challenges faced when attempting to implement mandatory programming for sexual offenders who categorically deny committing a sex offense.
• Present the WADOC SOTAP strategy for moving forward implementation inclusive of specific training in risk assessment, Motivational Interviewing, Core Correctional Practices (CCP), Impacting Behavior Change (IBC) and research surrounding denial and victim specific empathy.
• Discuss the value of involving and collaborating with agency and facility senior leadership early and often in the development of new programs which “don’t quite fit” the traditional model. Additionally, discussing the value of leveraging outside expertise to allow for a transparent discourse with the goal of added credibility in the process.
• Discussion regarding the importance of obtaining internal “buy-in” and looking backwards at previous efforts or attempts at implementation of similar programs and learning from those attempts.
• Overcoming internal resistance and a discussion of potential strategies for how to successfully implement programming which challenges a status quo.