

Why Certification?

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(Summer, 1998) One of the questions I am most frequently asked is Why should I bother to become (or stay) certified? This is a critical question in these days of ever increasing demands on our time, talent and treasure. The best answer that I know is that certification continues to be the optimal way currently available to demonstrate to your clients, to your colleagues, and to the world at large that you are willing to invest in the learning necessary, and have the skills needed, to provide the best care possible through biofeedback.

Included in the BCIA News are many of the efforts we have implemented to increase the value of BCIA certification, from making the process less cumbersome, while maintaining our high standards, to increasing recognition for those who demonstrate their continued commitment to excellence and learning through the Progressive Certification Program.

For example, BCIA has:

- Successfully petitioned the American Psychological Association for recognition of Biofeedback: Applied Psychophysiology as a proficiency in professional psychology. This is only the second proficiency recognized by APA.
- Fully implemented the Progressive Certification Program, which recognizes a certificant's increasing knowledge and expertise gained through continuing education and experience. The designations are: Certified; Associate Fellow; Fellow; Senior Fellow; and Senior Fellow Emeritus. In January 1998 we initiated our first group of Senior Fellows, those individuals who inaugurated our certification program in 1981 and have recertified since then.
- Fully implemented White Paper changes to Biofeedback Certification to make the process of certification more flexible and accommodating to candidates.
- Informed lapsed certificants about all of the above changes and invited them to become recertified.
- Completed Grandfathering for the new specialization in EEG biofeedback and notified over 500 new certificants. Grandfathering closed as of December 31, 1997 and full implementation of certification and recertification in EEG biofeedback is in progress.
- Opened a successful dialogue with the Allied Professionals Section of AAPB regarding our policies and how to apply them to their unique situation.
- Initiated a liaison with AAPB to better serve our mutual interests.
- Developed a Marketing Committee to educate the public as to the benefits of utilizing BCIA-certified providers.
- Revised supervision policies to facilitate training and practice opportunities.
- Begun development of our own Web site and are exploring a collaboration with Time - Warner's "Ask Dr. Weil" Web site for inclusion of the BCIA Register.

External Accreditation?

Another question, which has been raised, concerns the history of accreditation of BCIA by outside agencies. As a voluntary certification organization, BCIA is not subject to any mandatory standards or requirements for external accreditation. NCHCA, the National Commission for Health Certifying Agencies, was created in response to a study released in 1977 by The Health and Human Services Agency decrying the poor state of health certification in the US, lack of common standards, no assurance of quality certification, and little real effort to protect the public. Rather than create a government regulatory agency, they recommended a private agency set the standards and made grants available to do this. As BCIA was forming in 1980, Mark S. Schwartz, Ph.D. heard of this new association (NCHCA), became involved, and led BCIA

into membership. Subsequently, BCIA became one of the first certifying bodies in the US to be fully accredited by this body, and did so within one year of its initial membership. While expensive (\$3,000. yr.), it was felt to be worthwhile. Then in the mid 1980's, as other groups (particularly physicians and dentists) failed to meet criteria for accreditation within their set time period, they began to drop out and the organization faltered. Soon after, Dennis Falk, the Executive Director of NCHCA suffered traumatic frontal lobe damage in an auto accident and had to give up leadership of this organization. These two factors led to the rapid decline of NCHCA. BCIA noted the decrease in value of NCHCA accreditation as other organizations dropped out, and the Board voted to not renew its accreditation.

Soon after, NCHCA evolved into NOCA, National Organization for Competency Assurance, which created NCCA, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. This new group sought members from all certifying agencies in the US, not just health care groups, and allowed for both membership and accreditation levels. BCIA elected to become a member of NOCA, overall following their recommended standards, but not to pay the substantial additional costs of being accredited by NCCA. Because there are no required or mandated standards for voluntary certification programs, this decision was felt to be the best way to maintain the highest certification standards possible while simultaneously conserving scarce resources and keeping costs to our certificants to a minimum. Currently NOCA has 140 members, 35 of which have chosen to become accredited.

Approximately four years ago, NBACA, National Board of Accreditation for Certifying Agencies, a new accrediting agency, solicited BCIA's application for accreditation. The BCIA Board of Directors at that time voted to not pursue this course, as they felt NBACA accreditation did not provide sufficient benefit to warrant application.

BCIA continuously reviews opportunities to improve the value of its certification and will again seek external accreditation when such action provides clear benefit to our certificants and the public.

I want to thank AAPB for inviting me to share this information with the membership, and invite all my colleagues in AAPB to please join BCIA in our effort to set the standard of care in biofeedback. The greater the number of participants in voluntary certification, the better able we are to protect the public by fostering compliance with an agreed upon set of standards and provide the best certification programs possible. We need therefore to increase the number of Certificants and Recertificants across all programs. If you are already certified, please continue to recertify and educate your friends and colleagues as to the benefits of certification. If you are not certified, please reconsider this decision and contact us at BCIA (303-420-2902) to discuss how to join us in this quest for excellence.