

Certification and Multiple Certifications: Implications for the Practitioner

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(Summer, 1998) Recently there has been considerable confusion amongst individuals who are members of the Neurofeedback Division of the AAPB as well as members in both the AAPB and the Society for the Study of Neuronal Regulation (SSNR).

The problem has been the recent announcement of a second certification being developed in the area of neurotherapy. The second organization has quickly solicited at least 100 individuals to become charter members and to pay a registration fee within approximately a 2-week period in order to meet the qualifications of charter membership. During the past five years two other organizations have moved in the direction of developing certification. One was the Registry of Neurofeedback Providers, which solicited a number of individuals who paid registration fees. That organization never developed a certification procedure or an examination and only issued certificates, which, although they looked impressive, had no external validation. Fortunately the Registry faded away.

The second organization, which I was involved in, was called the Academy of Certified Neurotherapists (ACN). This organization also had planned initially to develop a full certification covering the areas of EEG, neurofeedback, and neurotherapy and had already gone to considerable lengths to begin to develop an examination and a set of pre-certification requirements.

Since I was associated with the initial development of BCIA and in fact was co-chairman of the initial examination committee along with Dr. Mark Schwartz, I was well aware of the development of BCIA and its external certification and validation by the National Commission of Health Certifying Agencies under the auspices of Dennis Falk. I participated in the early development of BCIA and watched its growth over the past decade and a half. During that period, BCIA has certified several thousand individuals in biofeedback and has become recognized as a standard of excellence by many employers including hospitals and private practices. Even more important BCIA had been recognized by many insurance carriers and began to acquire the recognition that is afforded other agencies of this type. An example of this is the National Registry of Health Service Providers in Psychology was developed in the early 1970's. This organization provides a registry of licensed psychologists who have completed internships and are well established in their field. It is recognized as a standard of excellence by many third party payors and has actively advocated for its registrants in order to help them further their professional goals as well as their financial situations vis-à-vis managed care and insurance carriers. It became very clear to me as a former President of ACN that the wise thing to do would be to amalgamate the Academy of Certified Neurotherapists under BCIA as a specialty certification in EEG biofeedback. After three years of negotiations and a considerable amount of time and effort, my colleagues Dr. Joe Kamiya, Dr. Peter Rosenfeld, and I along with other members of the Board of Directors of ACN officially moved ACN and its assets to BCIA and then dissolved the Academy. As a result we now have an excellent specialty certification under BCIA with more than 500 individuals who have completed the grandparenting. At the present time new applicants are required to take the fully developed EEG specialty certification examination after they have met the pre-certification requirements.

The question now is why do we need another certification, which would essentially duplicate the one we already have under BCIA. The individuals who are involved in developing the new certification in neurotherapy claim that BCIA does not have external validation through an organization such as the National Commission of Health Certifying Agencies. Dr. Mark Schwartz has

written a very eloquent reply and explanation of why this external certification is no longer necessary. He explained that it was very important in the development of BCIA and that the National Commission no longer exists in the same form as it did originally. Furthermore, only 30% of the organizations that were certified under the National Commission continue to have external certification and that it is very expensive to maintain this external validation. He further explained, and it is well established, that BCIA is nationally recognized and in fact individuals in other countries have sought and obtained BCIA certification for general biofeedback as well as EEG biofeedback.

One point that has been brought up by some individuals is that the EEG biofeedback certification under BCIA is too narrowly defined. This can be remedied in several ways. The EEG section (Division) of the AAPB has already unanimously requested that the certificate be changed to read Certification in EEG Neurofeedback. This request has been forwarded to BCIA and will certainly be honored. The next question that has been raised is the expansion of the EEG certification to be somewhat broader in its scope. This can be accomplished by subspecialty certification under the EEG certification of BCIA in such areas as quantitative EEG analysis (QEEG) or other types of EEG interventions which might fall under the rubric "neurotherapy" which include light and sound stimulation, evoked potential feedback, slow potential feedback, or other types of interventions which are designed to enhance various types of CNS or peripheral nervous system activity.

The new neurotherapy certification claims that they are going to be accredited by a national board of accreditation for certifying agencies, which would lend strong legitimacy and credibility to their effort. Anyone seeking this certification should certainly ask who is this board and what evidence is there that they can increase the credibility of this new certification if it does exist. The most important role of a certification is to first make sure that its registrants have met a number of qualifications through examination and continuing education that will help to increase their competency in whatever practice areas they participate. Another important role of a certifying agency is to advocate for its certificants with third party payors and managed care companies so that their certificants are recognized, leading to an increase in reimbursement for their services.

Perhaps in all fairness BCIA has not advocated as strongly in this regard as it could and this has led to some feeling that a stronger advocacy is necessary hence another certification may be necessary. This can certainly be remedied. BCIA has gained enormously both in terms of number certificants and in terms of its finances by the incorporation of the Academy of Certified Neurotherapists into the BCIA/EEG specialty certification. I would strongly urge BCIA to develop a very aggressive proactive procedure for helping its new certificants to be recognized and reimbursed for their services since at the present time reimbursement for neurofeedback and related services has been very poor compared with reimbursement for general biofeedback and other kinds of psychological interventions.

In summary, then, it is my feeling that the BCIA subspecialty certification in neurofeedback can fulfill all the roles that need to be filled in terms of a powerful certification, which includes a strong advocacy role. The other point is that certifications are expensive and in this age of decreased reimbursement for services that are provided by certificants why burden us with the need to pay for an additional certification and ultimately recertification when we already have a new certification under BCIA which is well established and can probably fulfill all of our needs? We need to contact the board of directors of BCIA and in particular the neurofeedback certification subspecialty committees and let them know what needs to be done to strengthen the existing certification so that all the needs of existing certificants will be met. Most important, everyone should realize that BCIA is externally validated, externally recognized, and well established and that if it is the desire of the certificants that they rejoin another external certifying agency or

accreditation board this is a relatively straight forward matter and can certainly be done. Let us support and strengthen our new and fully operational BCIA - EEG Neurofeedback Certification.