BCIA Certification: Building Skills Without Walls

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Keywords: biofeedback certification, BCIA, blueprint of knowledge, distance mentoring

The Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA) offers certification in general biofeedback, electroencephalography biofeedback, and pelvic floor biofeedback. Certification requires didactic learning, a course in anatomy and physiology, mentoring by a skilled biofeedback practitioner, and an examination covering foundational knowledge about biofeedback instrumentation, relevant physiology, biofeedback training techniques, and applications to common disorders. The requirements for certification can be met through readily available workshops, home-study modules, online learning, and mentoring on a face-to-face or distance basis. The BCIA requirements allow individuals in remote settings to acquire certification in a practical and flexible fashion.

A Case Study
Sally Jones lived in a rural setting offering counseling services to her clients. She became interested in the power of biofeedback and wanted to add this modality to her practice. To feel secure that she was well trained and qualified to treat her patients, she began to investigate certification from the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA). How could she accomplish such a feat as she had not been to school in five years and wondered whether the gray matter of her brain was still working.

Sally contacted a BCIA-certified professional who she had heard was treating the same client base as her own with good results. He told her to investigate certification from the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (BCIA). How could she accomplish such a feat as she had not been to school in five years and wondered whether the gray matter of her brain was still working.

Sally contacted a BCIA-certified professional who she had heard was treating the same client base as her own with good results. He told her that her electroencephalogram (EEG) assessment, used as a physiological marker test, showed strong beta waves without excessive slow-wave activity. She was ready to learn something new and challenging.

She called Judy Crawford at BCIA, who politely told her that “we have a very informative Web site, you know.” Sally visited www.bcia.org to learn that she would need the following:

- Didactic training: Sally learned she could get this part of her training by going away for a one-week workshop, by taking an online course, or by taking a home-study program. The didactic learning covers the knowledge outlined in the BCIA blueprint for each certification area.
- Anatomy/physiology: She was pleased to learn that this requirement could be filled without traveling two hours to the closest university. Many universities offer online or distance education courses, and there was even an anatomy/physiology program offered specifically for behavioral clinicians.
- Mentoring: Sally could find a local practitioner to work with, get distance mentoring, or do a combination of both. The required two hours of face-to-face mentoring could be accomplished through review of a videotape.
- Pass an exam: She could travel to an exam site or have the exam proctored at the local university or even at her public library.

Because Sally wanted to become certified in general biofeedback, her local EEG-biofeedback practitioner couldn’t help her. The only person certified in general biofeedback lived four hours away. She knew she would need to rely on distance mentoring.

Where could she find a distance mentor? She called Judy Crawford at BCIA, who politely told her, “It’s on our Web site under ‘Find a Mentor.’” Again, Sally visited www.bcia.org and contacted three people about becoming her mentors. She learned about the human body, took her didactic training, learned to apply the clinical skills, and passed her
exam—all without leaving her beautiful rural setting. She began offering biofeedback services to her grateful clients and lived happily ever after.

**Mentoring BCIA Style**

Over the years, BCIA has made some exciting strides in the area of mentoring. First, we have adopted a consultation model rather than a supervision model for mentoring. This removes many barriers to the process, including the restrictions placed on supervisors regarding charging for services and the liability issues facing supervisors.

A mentor’s task is to take a certification candidate through the development of practical skills. This is accomplished through BCIA’s three mentoring requirements:

1. personal training to teach the candidate self-regulation skills,
2. training sessions with patients/clients, and
3. case conferencing to broaden the knowledge base of the candidate’s skills.

**Benefits of Mentoring**

By using the Internet (through email, Go-To-Meeting, Skype, or other similar software program) and/or through phone consultation, distance mentoring benefits both the certified practitioner and the certifying candidate. The distance-mentoring model is a benefit for the candidate because it uses time efficiently (there is no need to travel to the mentor’s office); training may be done in the comfort of the home or office; and it can be an exciting learning adventure as a candidate can tap the knowledge of several seasoned professionals.

For the practitioner, distance mentoring is a benefit because it provides an opportunity to influence and pass down knowledge to the next generation; it’s a great way to generate more income and offers some variety to one’s routine work; and it provides a tool to rediscover the foundations of biofeedback and what originally drew one to the field.

BCIA hopes to break down any barriers and make certification accessible to all qualified health care professionals regardless of geography. If biofeedback is to grow and gain its rightful place in health care, we must all work together to offer education and training to those entering the field.

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**NEUROFEEDBACK FUNDAMENTALS WORKSHOP**

Lynda Thompson Ph.D., Michael Thompson, M.D. of the Biofeedback Institute of Toronto

**Invited Presenters:**

- Vietta Sue Wilson Ph.D.
- James Thompson, BSc.(Kinesiology), Ph.D., BCIA-EEG, Pennsylvania State University

**Guest Faculty:**

- Professor Vietta Sue Wilson Ph.D.
- Kinesiology & Health Science, York University
- James Thompson, BSc.(Kinesiology), Ph.D., BCIA-EEG, Pennsylvania State University

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