The Internationalization of BCIA

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The Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA)-Australia has recently become the first fully autonomous affiliate of BCIA, certifying neurofeedback professionals in Australia, with requirements equivalent to those of BCIA. BCIA has also established a worldwide network of professionals, who intermittently meet to promote biofeedback and neurofeedback certification in each national community. BCIA accredits programs providing basic training and continuing education.

Internationalizing the Name and the Organization

At its meeting in San Diego on March 28, 2010, the BCIA Board approved a motion to change the name from “Biofeedback Certification Institute of America,” to the “Biofeedback Certification International Alliance.” This name change reflected the Board’s recognition that BCIA certification was already reaching a broader audience of professionals worldwide. This new vision of international certification will be best served by an international alliance of affiliate organizations, each based in its own national community of professionals, collaborating globally to establish a gold standard of quality in the education, clinical training, and practice of biofeedback and neurofeedback. The BCIA Board hopes that this change will (a) invite new alliances with individuals and groups in other countries; (b) advance and strengthen our field by promoting training, education, and effective evidence-based practice; and (c) encourage our international colleagues to become BCIA board certified.

International Certificants

Nearly 10% of all BCIA certificants reside outside of the United States. During 2011, 34% of individuals who pursued first-time certification with BCIA live and practice outside the United States. BCIA currently has certificants in the following countries: Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, The Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Taiwan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela. The largest communities of certificants abroad are in The Netherlands (40) and Canada (49).

BCIA provides international certification for health care professionals in biofeedback, neurofeedback, and pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback, either at the entry-level or for the provider who can demonstrate advanced skills and training using the Certification by Prior Experience (CPE) program. While applicants in the United States may certify as a clinician, an academic or a technician, only clinical certification is available at this time outside the United States.

BCIA-A: The First International Affiliate

On July 8, 2011, an agreement was signed between BCIA and the BCIA-Australia (BCIA-A), an incorporated association in New South Wales, Australia. BCIA-A has now been established for the certification of Australian health professionals who practice neurofeedback. BCIA-A offers certification for both entry-level and advanced neurofeedback practitioners. At a later date, BCIA-A may extend its activities to certify practitioners of biofeedback as well.

Standards for this certification are at least equivalent to those of BCIA. Neurofeedback professionals will gain certification based on the same “Blueprint of Knowledge” developed by BCIA and will complete the same human anatomy/physiology and mentoring requirements and successful completion of the written BCIA exam. BCIA and BCIA-A will collaborate on many logistics, including a shared Web site, promoting neurofeedback certification “Down Under.”

BCIA-A is the first fully incorporated international affiliate of BCIA. The first chair of BCIA-A is Timothy.
Certification Exams Outside the United States

The BCIA exam has now been formatted for online delivery, in BCIA-approved sites, supervised by local preapproved university proctors. In 2011, BCIA certification exams took place in Canada, Germany, The Netherlands, and Mexico.

Additional international certification exams are in planning for 2012. Rabdoud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands, will host an exam on January 16, and the Universal College of Learning will host an exam in Palmerston, New Zealand, on February 10. Requests have been received for additional exam sites from South Africa, Australia, Brazil, Greece, Israel, and Egypt.

International Certification Committees

In 2010, BCIA named board member Donald Moss chair of the International Committee, and he began to recruit biofeedback professionals in a variety of countries worldwide, to represent their biofeedback communities. A series of teleconferences was held with these delegates in 2010 and 2011, discussing the status of biofeedback and neurofeedback practice in each country. The objectives of the meetings were to (a) promote BCIA certification for professionals in each community; (b) increase the number of BCIA-accredited training programs and exam sites outside the United States; (c) establish networks of BCIA certificants in each country, who could provide mentoring for certification applicants; (d) invite those countries with larger communities of practitioners to consider forming affiliate organizations similar to the affiliate in Australia; and/or (e) consider affiliations between BCIA and already existing international certification programs. BCIA is convinced that a worldwide international certification system will have strong credibility, enhance public trust in biofeedback and neurofeedback treatment, and provide a strong network to share research and publications that support the field. Biofeedback professionals from the following countries have participated in the teleconferences: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hong Kong (China), Japan, The Netherlands, and Taiwan.

When applicants from nations outside the United States seek BCIA certification, BCIA sometimes has difficulty assessing the quality of the applicant’s prerequisite education and training. Applicants are required to submit English translations of their educational transcripts and to have these translations certified by an independent organization, which is a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services. But even with certified English copies of transcripts, educational qualifications in remote parts of the world are sometimes challenging to assess. Several of the representatives participating in the international BCIA teleconferences have committed themselves to providing assistance to BCIA in screening and assessing international applicants’ educational and training qualifications.

Accreditation of International Workshops and Conferences

When a university or accredited institution of higher learning provides a continuing education workshop or didactic training program in biofeedback, neurofeedback, or pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback, and when that program follows the BCIA Blueprint of Knowledge, the training may be applied toward initial certification or recertification. The Blueprint of Knowledge is a basic aggregate of scientific knowledge and skills required for all certificants, and the BCIA certification exam covers this basic Blueprint. Certificants must achieve solid mastery and understanding of these facts and skills, which are regarded as essential for competent professional practice in each certification area.

When a private vendor, training company, or professional society provides training in biofeedback, neurofeedback, or pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback, then that organization must apply to BCIA for accreditation of its training program to ensure the quality of the content and appropriateness of its faculty. This is a requirement both in the United States and abroad. BCIA Board members and professional staff study the curricular materials for adequate coverage of the required knowledge and skills and accredit the program’s trainings for a 4-year period. This ensures uniform quality of training and consistency in the skills and knowledge covered worldwide for certification-oriented workshops.

Professionals interested in certification should be cautious in selecting a training provider. Some vendors advertise biofeedback training following the approved BCIA Blueprint of Knowledge but have failed to seek accreditation from BCIA. BCIA-accredited didactic training programs for biofeedback, neurofeedback, and pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback are listed on the BCIA Web site at http://www.bcia.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?
The BCIA Web site also lists workshops and programs that are approved for continuing education credit, so that current certificants can seek recertification. An example is the third annual Dutch Biofeedback Day, held on January 16, 2012, at the Erasmus Hospital at Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

The Importance of Internationalization

Increased international demand for BCIA certification and requests for collaboration say a great deal about the value of this credential. BCIA has served as the gold standard in biofeedback certification for 30 years. Our certification programs are based on hard science and best practices; our curricula are independent of equipment, vendors, and dogma; and we ensure the psychometric validity of our exams.

Internationalization provides opportunities for BCIA to cooperate with our international partners in developing education and training standards in biofeedback, neurofeedback, and pelvic muscle dysfunction biofeedback. Stronger international standards can increase the credibility of the field and recognition of well-trained biofeedback and neurofeedback professionals. Furthermore, our strategic partnerships promise to increase worldwide didactic, continuing education, and mentoring opportunities so that practitioners will be “More than qualified, BCIA Board certified!”

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