

PROFESSIONAL ISSUES



What's New with BCIA?

Judy Crawford

Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA), Wheat Ridge, CO

Keywords: accreditation, certification, continuing education

This article reviews developments at BCIA, including the HRV biofeedback certificate program, enhanced documentation of unlicensed certificants, appropriate credentials, international credentialing, and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

We are so glad you asked! The Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA) Board met recently and covered a very full agenda. As the popularity and acceptance of biofeedback grows and new applications arise, issues surface that need the best counsel and guidance that we have to offer. BCIA serves as the standards bearer for our field and we believe it is our job to set and define the basic requirements for education and training, staying abreast of current research and changes to the health care climate that impact the perception of the modality. We must always consider how we can best fit into the current healthcare delivery model and serve as a resource for clients, academics, researchers, and clinicians.

The Heart Rate Variability (HRV) Biofeedback Certificate

The new HRV Biofeedback Certificate program was introduced in a “soft launch,” allowing us time to work with the requirements and the process to see what adjustments, if any, needed to be made. To earn this certificate, an applicant must agree to abide by the *BCIA Professional Standards and Ethical Principles* (PSEP; BCIA, 2009), complete a BCIA-approved HRV biofeedback didactic program, document completion of 3 hours of ethics/professional standards course work within the last 5 years, and pass a nationally standardized online exam based on the 15-hour Blueprint of Knowledge. The BCIA website

provides more detail on this certificate, and a reading list to assist applicants in preparing for the exam.

The BCIA Board of Directors is proud to tell you that the very first group of certificate holders are from Truman State University. This talented group of undergraduate students received their didactic training, including ethics, as a course in the Psychology Department taught by Fred Shaffer, PhD, BCB. Thank you to Truman for endorsing and supporting the first university-based program of its kind formatted to teach the fundamentals of HRV biofeedback. This first group of certificate holders included: Sandi Bowers, Monica DeBold, Evan Fluty, Joseph Gregory, Alexander Kane, Margaux Kent, David Schultz, Samuel Shepherd, and Christopher Zerr. We look forward to learning how they will use HRV in their professional lives.

Many people attended the 2-day HRV preconference workshops offered at the AAPB meeting in Portland, Oregon. Attendees filed their applications and are in various stages of working through the requirements. Previous courses offered at professional meetings taught by Dick Gevirtz, Paul Lehrer, Donald Moss, and Fred Shaffer will also have provided the 15-hour Blueprint material. We look forward to the introduction of Blueprint-based didactic courses from some of the training programs that are already teaching some of the concepts.

BCIA initially planned to include 4 hours of ethics in the HRV blueprint. Upon further review and consideration, it was agreed that we would keep the ethics/professional conduct as a separate requirement to be taken either via a regular BCIA-accredited didactic training program, courses offered by national professional organizations, or any other method that BCIA would accept for certification or recertification credit in this area. That decision has been very helpful in allowing the Blueprint to be presented in

only two days, and also allowing credit for ethics or professional conduct course work already taken.

HRV is one of the largest growing areas in our field and we are pleased to have stepped forward to set the education and training standards that will lead to uniform education and increased competency of the providers. If you have any questions, please visit www.bcia.org and select Become Board Certified and the dropdown "HRV Certificate."

Clarification for Unlicensed Providers

BCIA has welcomed unlicensed providers since its inception in 1981. The prerequisite educational requirement is a BA/BS minimum in a health care field such as psychology, therapy, or nursing from a regionally accredited academic institution. As with any new certification program, it was initially difficult to sense how biofeedback and neurofeedback would best fit into the healthcare landscape. It is clear that many leaders in traditional medicine realize that they don't have all the answers and seek a broader range of choices for their patients. In order for our field to continue to gain respect and acceptance from the medical community, our providers need to work within the laws that regulate the treatment of diseases and disorders.

Important clarification: BCIA is unaware of any laws that specifically control or regulate the practice of biofeedback and neurofeedback, but there are laws that regulate using any modality to treat a diagnosed medical or psychological disorder. All states have licensing laws that define the scope of practice for a given profession and then further outline how a clinician is to provide clinical services. In accordance with state law, BCIA believes that in order to legally treat a medical or psychological disorder, one must have a state-issued health care license or credential, or must agree to work under appropriate supervision. If a person is using biofeedback or neurofeedback strictly for relaxation or peak/optimal performance, a state would not regulate that and therefore no license would be required. Because BCIA has no legal jurisdiction over clinical practice, it is very important for our certificants and the public we serve to understand who does. State licensing boards are in place to regulate health care and to protect the public by investigating claims of harm. This is their job while ours is to set the standards of education and training that lead to entry-level competency for biofeedback and neurofeedback services that fall within your scope of practice.

Since unlicensed providers cannot diagnose or independently treat medical or psychological disorders, these individuals must work within a licensed supervisor's scope of practice. In recognition of this legal requirement, the BCIA board recently agreed that starting with the class of

2014, all unlicensed providers who treat these disorders will need to list the name and email address of their primary supervisor for their clinical work. Providers who don't treat diagnosed disorders will simply note this on their application.

Appropriate Credentials

Most professional organizations, including The American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Medical Association (AMA), are concerned with credentials and how health care practitioners represent their education and licensure to the public. In recent years there has been an unprecedented increase in degree-granting programs with no recognition by the U.S. Department of Education, and no standing in any professional environment. Such programs should not be applied toward professional health care credentialing or certification. Another issue to avoid is using an advanced degree that is from an unrelated field, even though that degree may have been from a prominent institution. The APA further stipulates that degrees must be from regionally accredited institutions or be allowed for licensure by a state:

"Psychologists claim degrees as credentials for their health services only if those degrees (1) were earned from a regionally accredited educational institution or (2) were the basis for psychology licensure by the state in which they practice" (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 5.01c).

The BCIA Board voted to allow only credentials that verify degrees from regionally accredited academic institutions and licensure from fields currently accepted as prerequisites for certification to be posted on the Find A Practitioner search area of our website.

International Credentialing

Most countries have licensing or credentialing laws that help identify and define the scope of practice and the ethical and legal work of health care professionals when treating a medical or psychological disorder, even though different from the standards we know in the United States and Canada. Because BCIA can't always evaluate the education or professional background of international applicants appropriately, the Board voted to accept international applications only from professionals who carry and can demonstrate a government-issued health care credential. This applies to all applicants outside of the United States and Canada. All documentation of healthcare education and licensure must be translated and evaluated by an organization that is a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES; www.naces.org).

Should a group in another country or region wish to have more autonomy and control over who will be accepted for BCIA certification, they may enter into an affiliate relationship. Australia has already done this and is now successfully reviewing certification requirements for approval to take the standard BCIA neurofeedback exam at the 2013 annual conference of the Applied Neuroscience Society of Australasia (ANSA).

MOOCs

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are free educational opportunities providing topics and instructors from many top universities. If you find a course you are interested in, either to document completion of your human anatomy/physiology requirement for certification or for CE credit toward recertification, please send us all the information on the MOOC, and we'll let you know if this option will be accepted. This will open up many new affordable opportunities for continuing education by providing access to some of the best learning opportunities available.

Conclusion

The mission of BCIA is to certify individuals who meet education and training standards in biofeedback and to progressively recertify those who advance their knowledge through continuing education. In order to uphold this mission, BCIA strives to stay abreast of changes in the

healthcare landscape and to be attentive to what keeps our credential one to be respected and sought after. That is why we believe that our professionals uphold the tagline, “more than qualified—they are BCIA certified!”

References

- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA). (2009). *Professional standards and ethical principles of biofeedback* (5th ed.). Wheat Ridge, CO: Author.



Judy Crawford

Correspondence: Judy Crawford, Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA), Wheat Ridge, CO, email: jcrawford@resourcecenter.com.
