Professional certification programs must continuously assess and improve their blueprints, exams, and reading lists to stay relevant. In 2009, the Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA) revised its biofeedback and neurofeedback certification programs under the leadership of Randy Neblett and Leslie Sherlin. In 2012, BCIA revamped the Pelvic Muscle Dysfunction Biofeedback program under the guidance of Debbie Callif. For the past 8 months, BCIA’s Neurofeedback Task Force, led by Genie Davis, has collaborated with its stakeholders to revise the entire neurofeedback certification program to continue to reflect current science, technology, and practice standards. This article explains the goals and process that guided this herculean effort.

BCIA created a Neurofeedback Task Force to ensure that the neurofeedback certification reflects current science, technology, and standards of practice. Several members had participated in the 2009 revision of the biofeedback and neurofeedback certification exams. This task force had a great starting point—the BCIA blueprint—and a dedicated team comprised of the some of the hardest working professionals in the field. Dr. Genie Davis skillfully led the group (see accompanying photo). Her years of experience as a university department chair gave her the tools she needed to select the team, identify the specific tasks and their order of completion, and build a schedule that kept work goal-oriented with regular online meetings. BCIA selected task force members to ensure no conflict of interest related to proprietary hardware, software, assessment, or training protocols. Task force members included John Davis, Dave Hagedorn, Randy Lyle, Fred Shaffer, and Leslie Sherlin. They did their “homework” before each meeting, provided a forum for diverse perspectives, and collegially achieved consensus. Everyone on this task force remains friends!

The Neurofeedback Task Force’s work spanned almost 8 months of continuous collaboration. The foundation of every certification program is its blueprint. A blueprint must be based on accepted science published in refereed
journals and not on privately-held beliefs which have not been tested by peer review. The task force’s review of current research, clinical applications, and emerging science revealed that while the Neurofeedback Blueprint was sound, BCIA needed to add new topics, like preventing the transmission of infection, and reorganize the content areas. The BCIA Board unanimously adopted the current blueprint in 2014. The new blueprint consists of 10 content areas: Orientation to Neurofeedback, Basic Neurophysiology and Neuroanatomy, Instrumentation and Electronics, Research Evidence Base for Neurofeedback, Psychopharmacological Considerations, Patient/Client Assessment, Developing Treatment Protocols, Treatment Implementation, Current Trends in Neurofeedback, and Ethical and Professional Conduct. Although the task force added three new content areas, they maintained the previous total of 36 didactic hours.

The Neurofeedback Task Force invited all BCIA-accredited training providers and the International Society for Neurofeedback and Research (ISNR) board to help review the new blueprint. The task force also shared the blueprint with the Society of Applied Neuroscience (SAN) at the January meeting in Holland for their input and to aid their own review of the basic science underlying neurofeedback. The task force progressively revised the blueprint in response to many thoughtful suggestions from BCIA’s stakeholders. The end result is an international blueprint that reflects diverse scientifically-based perspectives.

Once the blueprint was finalized, the next stage was to review and enhance the neurofeedback exam. The task force examined the current neurofeedback exam items for relevance to the new blueprint, sourcing, clarity, and psychometrics. Questions from the current exam were reviewed and edited or replaced with new items sourced to the core reading list. Each reference in this list covers entry-level knowledge, serves as a source for multiple questions, and is both accessible and affordable. This list includes ISNR’s landmark Practice Guidelines for Neurofeedback and the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback’s (AAPB) Evidence-Based Practice in Biofeedback and Neurofeedback (3rd edition), among other texts. The core reading list is comparable to a reading list required by a university course. Exam items were selected from many sources, including BCIA-accredited training providers, continuing education (CE) accreditation applications, and the task force members, themselves, who are content experts. Each item was screened by the task force to ensure that it met BCIA’s criteria for construction, relevance to the blueprint, and sourcing. As a final stage of quality assurance, the exam will receive a full psychometric review—BCIA will test the test. This process takes many steps, including offering a subset of the new questions to many certificants and only incorporating questions that demonstrate acceptable validity. As a professional certifying body, BCIA exam development depends on sound psychometrics. Our paid consultants analyze the performance of existing and new exam items, and help us determine passing scores.

While BCIA expects to offer the completely revised exam before summer 2015, it has encouraged didactic training providers to update their teaching materials to include new blueprint learning objectives. Applicants and providers can find both the blueprint and reading list on the BCIA website at www.bcia.org—Become Board Certified, Neurofeedback.

Now that BCIA has finished revising its neurofeedback certification, it is time to update biofeedback certification. BCIA has already recruited a strong task force, whose members have started to critically examine the current biofeedback blueprint and core reading list. In Fall 2014, this task force will start meeting online twice a month. While this process of continuous improvement is expensive in terms of volunteer time, staff time, and psychometric assessment, it is essential for maintaining BCIA’s biofeedback and neurofeedback certifications as gold standards in this exciting and rapidly changing field.

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