The I in BCIA Stands for International

Judy Crawford

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The Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA) has certificants in 32 countries. The author chronicles the development of BCIA’s international outreach, reviews the challenges that had to be overcome, and explains why BCIA’s shift to ethics education and online testing were crucial to this process. This article concludes with a discussion of BCIA’s international affiliate program, recognition of its Australian and Mexican affiliates, and discussion of exciting developments in Canada.

The Challenge of Regulating Ethical Conduct

The decision to change the name from the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America to the Biofeedback Certification International Alliance (BCIA) was on the agenda over a long time—several years, in fact. Earlier boards were very concerned with how to regulate an international credential should a certificant do something wrong. BCIA went through a very important transition in previous years where the boards recognized that a certifying body has neither real regulatory nor meaningful disciplinary powers. All certifications are voluntary. BCIA sees its place as setting the standards of education, not punishing people who do not provide good service. These boards also realized that they neither had the power nor the financial means to launch a meaningful investigation. Clients who believed that they did not receive appropriate treatment would not allow access to medical records. Only state boards have subpoena authority to regulate the health care arena.

BCIA decided it would no longer launch an investigation where biofeedback is involved and find that it needs input from BCIA about the modality that was used, the appropriateness of the treatment protocol, or even the type of equipment being used, that board may contact BCIA for expertise. In fact, several states have contacted BCIA, and the first conversation is a review of our stance on licensure for independent practice when using biofeedback to treat a diagnosed medical or psychological disorder. In each case, the medical investigator approved of our statements within the reality of the laws that regulate the treatment of disease and disorders in their jurisdiction. A state licensing board has the power to really bring about a change to protect a client in a way BCIA cannot. If a state board removes a license, the certification is automatically revoked and can only be reinstated once the individuals reapply and demonstrate that they have regained their license in accordance with state licensing board processes and BCIA regulations. That is how BCIA can protect the public.

Once BCIA clarified its role in supporting state laws that regulate health care and the treatment of disease and disorder, it became clear that other countries would most likely also have a government-issued credential and a way to monitor the actions of clinicians who might misuse the modality. International professionals may only apply if they can demonstrate a government-issued license or credential in a health care field as described by BCIA standards. To date, there have been no instances where an applicant could prove that his or her country did not have a system to regulate who can legally treat medical or psychological disorders.

The Exam

For many years, the only strong and viable non-U.S. interest in BCIA exams was Canada. BCIA recognized that...
interest in biofeedback and neurofeedback was growing both inside the U.S. and outside as well. The BCIA boards carefully considered whether international certification was even feasible. How would it work? What would it look like? Various entities approached with only one question—Can you translate the exam? Yes, of course BCIA could translate the exam, but how would that be meaningful if the didactic courses were available only in English, if the texts that comprise the core reading lists and serve as the basis of the exam were not yet translated, and if the exam was not offered in an online capacity, allowing for an exam to be conducted anywhere in the world?

BCIA formed a partnership with Blackboard, the most robust online teaching and testing system used by universities at that time. All exams were transferred into this software and using password protection and a third party to provide on-site monitoring, it became possible for anybody to locate a university-based testing center to provide the security necessary for an exam of this type.

Will BCIA consider exam translation? Yes, of course. But, please remember, that is not the only obstacle. The BCIA’s international task force, chaired by Don Moss, PhD. BCB, BCN, was charged with developing the standards for exam translation and the feasibility of a fee schedule that considers the economic realities in each country or region. Translation of a BCIA exam will now be considered upon receipt of a request from an affiliate with 25 members with 10 member applications that have been submitted and approved as eligible for certification.

**What is an Affiliate Program?**

BCIA developed an idea in response to the Australian biofeedback and neurofeedback practitioners who wanted to figure out a plan to push for standards and certification in their country. They were the perfect group to work with—they had a similar system of health care credentials and they spoke English. After our first meeting together, we knew we had the basis for a great idea—an affiliate program. BCIA-A was the first formal affiliate program.

An affiliate program is an arm of BCIA based in a country or a region with a strong biofeedback or neurofeedback membership organization. That group decides that they need a certification and considers how it could look. BCIA works together with the national leaders in biofeedback to establish any changes to prerequisites that might be necessary to suit the current health care landscape in that country. Both sides enter into a formal agreement that establishes roles and responsibilities. The national group forms a committee to review applications, making the necessary judgment on how the requirements are documented. Was the education taken at a recognized university? Is the license valid and intact? Does the human anatomy/physiology course work meet set standards? Were the didactic programs and mentoring completed appropriately? Are there other requirements that were added specific to that affiliate? This same board can provide guidance for how to find a qualified mentor and how to legally use the modality within the laws that regulate health care. Upon approval, the applications are sent to BCIA, and at that time, arrangements can be made for the administration of the exam.

BCIA will consider a tiered pricing for international certification fees, based on a comparison to a schedule such as is used by the World Psychiatric Association country grouping. Affiliates can also begin their own accreditation process when the group is strong enough to have training programs that meet the blueprint standards. No money will be exchanged up front and the affiliate will keep the filing fee and BCIA keeps the certification fee to pay for the exam administration.

BCIA is a proud sponsor of the 2015 Annual Conference of the Applied Neuroscience Society of Australasia (ANSA) in August in Adelaide, South Australia. This meeting hopes to build on the success of the 2014 conference using the theme “Neuroplasticity: Reaching our Potential.”

**BCIA-Mexico**

BCIA is also pleased to announce the BCIA-M, an affiliate program in Mexico. This relationship is based on the guidance of the Mexican membership organization: The Mexican Society for Bio- and Neurofeedback. There is a growing population of clinicians, researchers, and educators in Mexico who are involved in this field and want to see the educational and training requirements standardized and promoted in a way that will make sense within their health care system. Now, there will be a way for professionals to more easily earn BCIA certification with the guidance and oversight of their board.

**Who Can Become a BCIA Affiliate**

Any group of biofeedback or neurofeedback practitioners in a specific country or region can form an association and apply to BCIA to form a BCIA affiliate program. It is important that the group of practitioners maintain autonomy from all corporate entities engaged in equipment sales or other commercial interest. The BCIA affiliate should be an independent professional organization dedicated to promoting the highest standards of evidence-based ethical practice. In addition, whenever possible, the new professional organization should avoid factional disputes and
provide an avenue to bring together the entire community of biofeedback and neurofeedback practitioners in a country or region.

When the membership reaches 25, this affiliate can petition BCIA to begin exam translation. BCIA will be responsible for translation costs and will begin the process only when the Board regards the exams as relatively up to date and stable. The affiliate will be responsible for translating certification materials, including applications, core readings, and the website sections that apply to the certification.

**Recognition of Neurofeedback in Canada**
The 2014 Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Convention was unique in that there were CPA-sponsored presentations on EEG biofeedback (Neurofeedback) research conducted at Western University in Ontario. The presenters were psychologist Dr. Paul Frewen and graduate student Teddy Chow. They are part of a team that includes psychiatrist Dr. Ruth Lanius. Also, Dr. Lanius’s brother, Ulrich Lanius, a psychologist in Vancouver, presented on the LENS system. These presentations prompted further contact with the CPA with a view to forming a new section within the association. The support was enthusiastic, and very quickly there were the 25 CPA members who were required to create the section entitled “Quantitative Electrophysiology.” A big thank you goes out to Drs. Altholl Malcolm, PhD, BCN, and John Davis, PhD, BCN.

**Where are BCIA Certificants?**
Currently there are BCIA certificants in 32 countries. Each time a new international professional earns the BCIA credential, his or her picture and a brief biographical sketch are posted on the homepage website. Most recently, you may have read about new certificants from Spain and Norway. BCIA is working with new applicants from France, Serbia, Kuwait, and Qatar. Candidates from several other countries are expressing interest, including Brazil, India, South Africa, and Greece. Neurofeedback especially is gaining considerable interest. BCIA believes that this is because of the strong research that is growing in support of the efficacy of using neurofeedback in new ways and with disorders where no effective drug treatments have been available.

BCIA believes that having sound educational standards built on strong science that is free of commercial bias will help move biofeedback and neurofeedback toward full acceptance as a respected modality in health care further supporting the statement, “More than qualified—BCIA certified!”

Correspondence: Judy Crawford, Executive Director, Biofeedback Certification International Alliance, 5310 Ward Rd, #201, Arvada, CO, email: jcrawford@bcia.org.