

The Human Services--Board Certified Practitioner: A Review of the Current State

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Abstract

The Human Services--Board Certified Practitioner (HS-BCP) is the only credential of its kind to govern the field of human services. There is no recent literature on its growth, impact, or status over the last six years. It is beneficial for human service practitioners to remain up-to-date on the credential in order to make decisions on becoming credentialed and achieving the benefits of being credentialed. This brief report gives an update on the current state of the credential in terms of growth and development. This information provides an update to the key components of the exam and requirements for eligibility. Growth in the numbers of certified HS-BCPs since inception of the certification is noted as well as advances in testing and technology as it relates to credentialing requirements. Finally, future considerations in advertising and marketing are thoroughly examined as reported by the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE).

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The Human Services--Board Certified Practitioner (HS-BCP) credential was established in 2008 by the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE), in collaboration with the National Organization for Human Services (NOHS) and the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE; Hinkle & O'Brien, 2010). The focus of this credential was to establish the human services profession among other professions such as psychiatry, psychology, counseling, and social work, which all meet three primary standards: accreditation, an ethical code, and credentialing (Neukrug & Milliken, 2010). The goal of credentialing is assessing professional's learned knowledge and experience based on state and national standards. The HS-BCP assesses knowledge, skills, and abilities in the field of human services. The guiding principles are grounded in education, experience, assessment, ethical practice, and continuing education (Hinkle & Obrien, 2010). The credential has been available in the field for six years and has become a viable part of human services practice. It is the only credential of its kind to head

the field of human services. However, the current state of the credential is unknown. This brief report will give an update on the current state of the credential in terms of growth and development.

Literature Review

The establishment of the HS-BCP began in 2008 (Hinkle & O'Brien, 2010) and as a result of the newness of the credential there is a lack of literature that specifically addresses the growth and impact the credential has had in the field of human services. However, literature reveals that prior to the credential there was difficulty in establishing and defining the field of human services. In fact, human service workers were often seen as assistants and not professionals (Evenson & Holloway, 2003). The lack of uniformity in the field possibly lowered the value of the profession, which contributed to the struggle in establishing it among helping professions. There were also variations in how the field of human services was defined. In an effort to define the field, Kincaid (2009) identified four themes in characterizing the field and proposed a universal definition. The foundation of defining the field of human services is rooted in integrated interdisciplinary knowledge, client self-determination, processes to facilitate change, and systemic change at all levels of society (Kincaid, 2009). The National Organization for Human Services (n.d.) adopted a universal definition that has underpinnings of Kincaid's (2009) themes. In addition, the development of the HS-BCP set universal standards that brought consistency and stability to the field and began to establish it as valuable and relevant among helping professions (Hinkle & O'Brien, 2010). The National Organization for Human Services promotes the HS-BCP and contends that the credential strengthens visibility and credibility among human service careers nationally and internationally (National Organization for Human Services, n.d.).

The HS-BCP focuses on verification of standards and experience through education, examination, field experience, and continuing education (Center for Credentialing & Education, n.d.a). Qualification for the credential involves participants having associates, bachelors, and master's degrees or higher, as well as post degree experience, which varies by degree (Center for Credentialing & Education, n.d.a). At least half of the experiences must be post degree (CCE, n.d.a). In addition, individuals approved must take an examination that covers four defined areas of human services including: (a) assessment, treatment planning, and outcome evaluation; (b) theoretical orientation/intervention; (c)

case management, professional practice, and ethics; (d) administration, program development/evaluation, and supervision (CCE, n.d.a). The HS-BCP is voluntary and acknowledges that practitioners have completed several core human service-related content areas that align with education and experience and it further supports a commitment to growth, education, and constructs that govern the field of human services (NOHS, n.d).

Current State of the HS-BCP

The HS-BCP was normed by human service practitioners and students during 2010 (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Flora indicates there have been over 2,200 practitioners credentialed since its inception. This number does not include those who have begun the application process, but have yet to meet all the requirements to obtain the credential. As with any new credential, Flora states changes have been made to the HS-BCP credential in order to ensure it is up-to-date in meeting national standards and guiding principles of the field. For the HS-BCP, these changes include updated assessments, changes in experience requirements, use of the HS-BCP as an assessment tool on college campuses, availability in multiple formats, and increased marketing efforts (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

Vignettes and questions for the exam are reviewed and updated by a diverse committee of industry professionals to provide versions of the exam reflecting current trends in required services and questions comply with current industry trends and are clearly written for those sitting for the exam (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). The constant updating of questions also maintains rigor and value of the exam ensuring national and ethical compliance.

Since 2012, the HS-BCP exam has been used as an exit test for many of the 28 human service higher educational programs currently participating with CCE (n.d.b). Students enrolled in programs that mandate the exam are taking a proctored paper and pencil exam at their local college or university to assess their field knowledge prior to graduation (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Flora states other students are allowed to register for the exam at an outside testing center. The passing exam results are held by CCE for five years and can be transferred into an HS-BCP credential at no additional charge (Flora & O'Brien, 2013). Graduates have up to five years to complete the experience requirements in order to become credentialed (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Participating programs are given aggregated data on the

assessment that can be used to improve programming and to compare results across the country (Flora & O'Brien, 2013). CCE is moving towards putting the exam online so that it is accessible via Internet Based Testing (IBT) for participating universities and colleges to administer in their testing labs. This process is in the trial phase and planned to be beta tested the summer of 2014 (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). CCE plans to work out any issues that may arise during the beta testing process before offering IBT to those universities currently utilizing the exam on site (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

There has been a change in the experience requirement for those applying for the credential. Originally, all relevant field experience had to be completed post degree (CCE, n.d.a). The new mandate requires a minimum of half the experience to be completed post degree. Those currently working in the field can utilize their experience prior to obtaining a degree to meet the other half of the experience requirement (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). This may present a barrier for students who are attempting to obtain the credential immediately after completing degree requirements; however, students benefit by being allowed to utilize pre-degree and internship hours (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

The CCE has a focus on marketing and promotion of the credential to increase value and recognition (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Efforts are focused on encouraging human service program participation with increased focus on collegiate programs across the United States, according to Flora. The CCE has conducted workshops on local and national levels for students that focus on credentialing and the value of the HS-BCP credential (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Additionally, CCE has conducted workshops that target education administrators. These workshops provide the opportunity for students to test, by incorporating the HS-BCP exam into degree programs, to use on-site test centers, and to utilize the data from aggregate score reports (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). In addition to student assessment, participation with the CCE offers other benefits to educational institutions—it builds interest in the value of the HS-BCP credential (Flora & O'Brien, 2013). Student program members of the Council for Standards in Human Service Education receive a discount on exam fees, which also fosters a focus on human service programs becoming accredited (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). Future marketing and advertising efforts will

focus on data obtained through a personal survey of the 2,200 credentialed practitioners on their use of the credential, career status, population being serviced, and demographics (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014). This information will be used to increase advocacy efforts and recognition by local, state, and government agencies (R. Flora, personal communication, April 28, 2014).

Relevance to the Field of Human Services

The HS-BCP was established to maintain high standards in human services and is the only credential specific to the field of human services. It provides quality, value, and integrity for practitioners, employers, and consumers of human services. It further provides distinction to the field of human services by clearly setting it apart from other helping professions. The HS-BCP provides a way of documenting that practitioners maintain standards of integrity and conduct. It provides a means for documenting that practitioners protect the welfare and interests of clients. Furthermore, it offers a way to document that practitioners accept responsibility for their actions, seek to enhance their occupational abilities, and practice with fairness and honesty (Hinkle & O'Brien, 2010).

The HS-BCP has been in existence for six years. During this period, over 2,200 practitioners have been credentialed and several changes have taken place to further advance the value of the credential. Collegiate programs have expressed increased interest in using the exam as an assessment tool and efforts are in place to further advance and promote the HS-BCP credential.

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