

Letter to Counseling Today

Here is the letter we sent to Counseling Today for publication. We are hoping our perspective will be aired to give balance to the debate over CACREP accreditation and TRICARE and the Veteran's Administration provider status

Professional Identity Should Not Include Professional Discrimination: *CACREP Must Recognize All Counselors and Counselor Educators*

CACREP's relative obscurity in the day-to-day world of practicing mental health counselors has not diminished its new role as a major player in who can be employed by the Veteran's Administration (VA), who can be reimbursed by TRICARE (the federal insurance for active military and their families), and potentially, who will be reimbursed by MEDICARE, should Congress seek to model MEDICARE reimbursement on TRICARE.

Those who support CACREP, a voluntary accrediting agency, as the standard to secure reimbursement with federal insurers are setting a dangerous precedent. The large majority of state licensed mental health counselors have graduated from non-CACREP Programs, and thus may be excluded from providing mental health services to large segments of our society.

Many mental health counselors may not realize that CACREP assumes a restrictive vision of who can teach as a core faculty member in a mental health counseling graduate program; and this is the prime reason, outside of cost, why many universities have not pursued CACREP accreditation. After 2013, CACREP prohibits psychologists, social workers, family therapists, and psychiatrists, from being full-time core faculty members in accredited programs, however significant their contributions may be to the mental health field. Ironically, if Carl Rogers, for example, wished to teach in a CACREP program today, he would be prohibited due to CACREP's requirement that only CACREP trained PhDs may occupy core faculty positions.

It is regrettable that CACREP cannot accept the diversity of professional specialties that exist in our field, but attempts to impose a highly restrictive vision of who can be recognized by our Federal Government as a mental health counselor. As we are now seeing in the VA and TRICARE regulations, CACREP's definition of mental health counseling will result in professional discrimination against mental health counselors who graduate from non-CACREP, counseling psychology, and "related masters degree" programs who are licensable in their states.

Without an opposing voice, the CACREP graduation requirement could travel beyond the isolated silos of the VA and TRICARE, limiting access to mental health services for our most vulnerable clients—the poor, the elderly, members of the military, and others who cannot pay out of pocket to see a mental health counselor.

We encourage CACREP to rise to the occasion and embrace the professional diversity currently found in the field of counseling. CACREP can do so by offering a national accrediting model to fit this diverse field – criteria dearly needed to insure national standards and portability. CACREP has chosen instead to be a partisan voice and not an agent of national professional unity.

This article was written jointly by the Boards of the Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors of Maryland and the Massachusetts Mental Health Counselors Associations. Our organizations encourage all counselors to write to ACA, AMHCA, and CACREP Leadership, if they share our concerns about professional discrimination in our field.