Addiction Counseling Licensure Issues for Licensed Professional Counselors

Keith Morgen  
Geri Miller  
LoriAnn S. Stretch

The counseling specialty system has been criticized by arguing that a counseling specialty only defines a practice area. The addiction area is one such area of specialization and the only one focused on a specific DSM-IV-TR disorder class that comes with a separate licensure/credentialing process. The professionalization of addiction counseling strengthened the field and provided a higher-quality of care for those struggling with addiction. However, the authors argue that the licensure/certification process inherent within that professionalization reinforced the notion that addiction falls outside the scope of practice for professional counselors. The authors believe that there is a critical need to recalibrate the licensure/certification process as it pertains to professional counselors and addiction work. Furthermore, the authors believe that the imbedded message in the current licensure/credentialing process (due to the separate addiction counseling licensure/certification track) is that licensed professional counselors cannot and/or should not do addiction work.

For instance, the authors underscore that the original high standards (e.g. upwards of 3,000 hours of clinical work/supervision) now require recalibration that takes into account professionals desiring to work in the addiction profession with graduate counselor training (as opposed to a high school diploma or GED which was historically, for the longest time, the predominant educational background for those working in the addiction profession). Currently, professional counselors entering the addiction counseling profession with a graduate counseling degree may be required to complete additional training requirements dating back to a prior era. However, under today’s standards for a counseling graduate degree (master’s or doctorate) these mandates seem excessive and possibly even redundant.

Two remedies for the licensure/credentialing problems are presented. One possible solution is to develop a tiered system of addiction counseling credentials at a national level that takes into account professional experience as well as educational training. The other possible solution covers the standardization of training that addresses the theoretical and practical skills required of an addiction counselor nationwide.