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An Introduction to the Special Section on Professional Standards in Human Services

Tammi F. Milliken and Edward S. Neukrug
Co-Editors, Journal of Human Services

We are excited to offer our readership a special section on standards in the profession of human services. Within specialty fields, standards are identified as a profession evolves. Thus, standards are a mark of the maturity of a profession and offer a benchmark of excellence to which individuals and programs should adhere. They suggest certain exclusivity, in that adherence to the standards implies that individuals or programs have achieved at high levels. This exclusivity helps to ensure that the public is protected and served well by members of the profession; it also lessens the likelihood of poor professional practice and malpractice suits.

In the helping fields of psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling, and human services, three standards have predominated: accreditation, ethical codes, and credentialing. *Accreditation* is concerned with training efficacy and requires established standards be met to ensure program rigor. *Ethical codes* are concerned with clarifying the profession's principles and consist of standards required for responsible professional behavior. *Credentialing* is concerned with a professional's learned knowledge and experience and is based on state or national standards established by the profession or related bodies to the profession.

Psychiatry, psychology, social work, and counseling have had standards in each of the three areas for some time. The youngest of these professions, human services, now has standards in all three areas with its recent adoption of the Human Services—Board Certified Practitioner (HS—BCP) credential. The ongoing refinement of standards in human services speaks to the profession's maturity and positions human services as an even more viable profession in the helping fields.

To contribute to our understanding of the development, current status, and projected direction of accreditation, ethical codes, and credentialing in human services, a number of experts in these standards were invited to contribute articles on each topic for this special section. Whereas most professionals see only the end product of these standards, we believe these articles illustrate the arduous and painstaking process that takes place in the development of these important standards. This information may assist in clarifying the value of standards as well as engendering action toward ensuring standards are met in human service programs, professional practice, and throughout the field.

We are extremely fortunate to have Dr. Susan Kincaid and Dr. Susan Andresen co-author the article on accreditation. Both Drs. Kincaid

and Andresen have served as executive officers of the Council for Standards in Human Service Education (CSHSE) for many years in several positions, and notably, both have served as Vice President of Program Accreditation. Their article, titled *Higher Education Accountability and the CSHSE Accreditation Process*, compares government-regulated standards for education to national standards set forth by self-regulatory accrediting boards such as the CSHSE. An overview of the accreditation process for human service programs through CSHSE is described, and benefits to CSHSE accreditation are illuminated. Finally, specific details about the steps required for human service programs to apply for accreditation are detailed.

For the article on NOHS's ethical code, we are fortunate to have Dr. Linda Wark, current Chair of the Ethics Committee of NOHS, write an article entitled, *The Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals: Past and Future*. This article presents the many purposes an ethical code serves as well as inherent difficulties in the development and implementation of an ethics code. It then provides us with background on the development of NOHS's Ethical Standards for Human Service Professionals. The article lists the general categories addressed by NOHS's code and suggests there are many areas that NOHS may want to consider in a future revision of its code. It contrasts an aspirational code, such as NOHS's, with an enforcement code, such as that developed by the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE). Finally, it suggests that it may be time to revise NOHS's code and that such a revision should consider the code's content as well as the process that takes place. NOHS's current code is placed at the end of the journal for your convenience.

Finally, relative to the credentialing process, we are proud to have Dr. Shawn O'Brian, vice-president of the Center for Credentialing and Education (CCE), and Dr. Scott Hinkle, Director of Professional Development for CCE, write a piece called, *The Human Services-Board Certified Practitioner: An Overview of a New National Credential*. Drs. O'Brian and Hinkle first present us with a history of the development of the HS-BCP. Next they provide us with an understanding of the collaborative process that took place between the CCE, NOHS, and CSHSE in the development of the certification process. They also highlight the guiding principles that drove the development of the HS-BCP, and explain how an assessment tool was devised, how different levels of education and experience were decided, and why a separate code of ethics was needed. In addition, they describe the continuing education needed to maintain the credential.

We believe that this special section on standards in the profession will be enlightening, informative, and in some cases, eye-opening. As a human services professional, educator, and/or student, we encourage you to experience pride in your profession as you deepen your

understanding of the development of the field of human services and its evolution into a respectable, standards-based profession. Enjoy this special section and consider how you might be able to serve NOHS, CSHSE, and CCE in future revisions of these standards.