



STATE OF NEBRASKA

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Don Wesely, Chairman
Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Gregg F. Wright, M.D., M.Ed.
Director of Health

DATE: July 10, 1989

SUBJECT: Recommendations Regarding the Credentialing of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors

This proposal was submitted by the Nebraska Association of Substance Abuse Directors and defines two levels of certification for Substance Abuse Counselors to be administered by the Department of Health Bureau of Examining Boards. Currently the Department of Public Institutions certifies Substance Abuse Counselors.

A technical committee was appointed to review the proposal. A public hearing was held on September 2, 1988, at which testimony was given both in favor of the proposal and in opposition to aspects of the proposal, most notably the education requirements. After consideration of this testimony and additional study, the technical committee, with the consent of the applicant group, suggested amendments to the proposal to create three levels of certification. The committee then agreed unanimously that the proposal met all of the criteria in the statute and should be recommended.

The Board of Health reviewed the proposal and the technical committee report, heard briefly from proponents and opponents, and subsequently recommended approval of the proposal unanimously. In addition they recommended that the title, "Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor" be restricted to those individuals who are certified by the state, and urged that secondary schools in Nebraska be encouraged to increase their involvement with alcohol and drug abuse counselors in Nebraska.

A significant number of individuals continued to express opposition to the proposal and, at least in part because of the continuing disagreement, no bill was introduced to effect the changes represented in this application. The primary opposition was expressed by the Nebraska Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC). This group was newly reorganized as this proposal was being reviewed and did not feel that they were able to fully participate in the review process at the technical level. It is our

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understanding that a working group has been formed between the applicant group, Nebraska Association of Substance Abuse Directors, and NAADAC, to resolve the issues between them.

Department of Health Review

To the degree that a significant group of affected individuals did not feel that they were represented as this review progressed, the process did not work as anticipated. It would appear that the application itself catalyzed the formation of the opposition group, and for this reason they were unable to fully express their views at the technical level. However many of the same views were expressed both to the technical committee and to the Board of Health.

There is a general agreement about many aspects of this application. Few would disagree that the public would benefit from a more precise certification process that would give a clearer assurance of quality service. The importance of reliable and competent counseling for alcoholism and drug abuse is, if anything, growing rapidly as these problems are growing in magnitude and importance. The field should be recognized and reinforced as a professional discipline. There is a large consensus that the Department of Health is an appropriate agency to do this certification because the Bureau of Examining Boards regulates most other health professions. This eliminates a potential conflict between DPI's present role as a service provider and this role as a quality assurance agent. It also takes advantage of the licensing expertise and economies of scale within the Bureau of Examining Boards. Finally, there is little disagreement that the current certification statute does not provide sufficient detail either to define the scope of the profession or to allow a fair and accountable regulation of the profession.

In all of these the Department of Health concurs, and therefore agrees that he certification should be strengthened and moved to the Department of Health.

Three issues appear to have generated most of the controversy:

What is the role of a college degree in certification and at what level of certification should it be required?

What is the capacity of the colleges to provide the needed training specific to drug and alcohol abuse counseling, both in specific content areas, and in geographic areas of the state?

What is the role of life experience, including personal experience with addiction, in the preparation of a competent Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor, and how can it be acknowledged and credited?

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These are important questions and this review did not generate specific enough information to answer them. The Department of Health commends NASAD and NAADAC for their efforts to bring a resolution to this aspect of their field. We will encourage these efforts in the second half of this year and would hope that an appropriate credentialing bill can be defined. Because this is a controversial and developing area, I do not expect that any system can be written that will satisfy everyone. Hopefully, however, a significant consensus can be defined.

The Department also agrees with the Board of Health in their additional recommendations that the title of "Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor" be limited to only those who receive state certification, and that postsecondary schools in Nebraska be encouraged to increase their involvement with the education of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors.

GFW/all

