



COUNCIL ON REHABILITATION EDUCATION, INC.

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November 4, 2010

Department of Veterans Affairs
Human Resources
1540 Spring Valley Dr.
Huntington, West Virginia 25704

ATTN: Kent Wellman
Staffing Policy Specialist

Dear Mr. Wellman,

We are writing this letter in response to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs recent decision to recognize and include Licensed Professional Counselors in the list of recognized behavioral mental health practitioners within the VA system. While we are aware that the decision was a victory for the counseling profession, we are writing specifically to discuss the requirement that a qualified individual must be a graduate from a CACREP accredited program. The decision to include only graduates from CACREP programs excludes Licensed Professional Counselors from programs accredited by the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) that train rehabilitation counselors. Excluding CORE graduates ignores the recognition within the counseling profession that CORE and CACREP standards are equivalent, creates an access to care issue for veterans, and disenfranchises a significant portion of licensed professionals in the United States who are legitimately trained and licensed to provide professional counseling services.

The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) began accrediting rehabilitation counselor education programs in 1974, the same year that the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC) began issuing the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor credential. The CRCC certifies roughly 16,500 Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC) at the present time. In a recent CRCC certificant survey to assist CRCC with its strategic development, 23% of the CRCs responding indicated that they are licensed to provide professional counseling services in the state where they reside. We are speaking of a significant portion of the universe of professional counselors in the United States.

Rehabilitation counselors have a long history of working with veterans. The Soldier's Rehabilitation Act in 1918 marks the "official" beginning of rehabilitation counseling. While our historical roots of providing vocational rehabilitation services may confuse some, many graduates from CORE accredited programs in the 21st century are eligible for licensure. In 1998, the American Counseling Association (ACA) Governing Council passed a "parity resolution" stating that CORE and CACREP

accreditation standards are equivalent for the purposes of licensure. CRCC and CORE leaders lobby for the inclusion of rehabilitation counselors in licensure laws across the United States using this parity resolution. Clearly, the counseling profession regards graduates of programs accredited by both as equivalent.

Considering the historical roots of rehabilitation counseling began with veterans almost a hundred years ago, the exclusion of rehabilitation counseling by the VA limits the access to care for American veterans. Scott Barstow from the ACA Public Policy and Legislation office reported to us that the access to care by veterans with mental health issues is particularly problematic in rural areas. Approximately 25% of the United States population resides in rural areas and yet the percentage of counselors practicing in rural area is disproportionately lower at five percent. Of the practicing counselors residing in rural areas, it has been estimated that only 25% have graduated from a CACREP accredited program. Disenfranchising rehabilitation counselors who are licensed counselors further exacerbates the problem.

We are confident that you will understand our position and agree that if CORE and CACREP standards have been recognized by the counseling profession as equivalent for the purpose of licensure, then *graduates from CORE accredited programs who are licensed to practice as professional counselors should be regarded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as equally qualified to work as Professional Mental Health Counselors.*

We would like the opportunity to speak with you further about this matter. Dr. Frank Lane will serve as the point of contact for the group and will be contacting you shortly to coordinate a day and time for a teleconference.

Respectfully,



Tom Evenson, Ph.D., CRC
President, CORE



Christine Reid, Ph.D., CRC
Chair, CRCC



Frank Lane, Ph.D., CRC, LCPC
President, ARCA



Penny Willmering, Ph.D., CRC, LPC
President, NRCA



Bonnie Hawley, CRC
President, NRA

cc: Scott Barstow
Director, ACA Public Policy