



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH  
WASHINGTON DC 20420

APR 19 2012

Mr. David Bergman  
National Board for Certified Counselors  
1001 N Fairfax Street, Suite 510  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Dear Mr. Bergman:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recognition of Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) and Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselors (LPMHC).

I appreciate your concern regarding the hiring within these professions as they are an essential component of VA health care. Health care professionals who can provide counseling and/or psychotherapy services to individuals, groups, couples, and families in a culturally competent manner provide a multi-disciplinary approach to the treatment of Veterans. VA has taken extensive efforts to expand its mental health services over the last several years.

The process to create and implement a new qualification standard for a health care occupation is long and arduous. These developed qualification standards provide additional options for mental health staff to recruit and appoint MFTs and LPMHCs in VA medical centers, outpatient centers, and Vet Centers. In some facilities, social work staff may have been encouraged to take supplemental training in family therapy in order to meet the needs of the Veterans when staffing issues arose. Training for the boards to be utilized in the medical centers was completed in January of this year, and the training for the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) boards is currently in process.

Each facility must determine the needs of their local Veteran population and determine what occupations should be utilized to meet this need. This approach is taken to ensure that our Veteran patients are getting the mental health care they need and deserve.

RCS remains committed to hiring one qualified family counselor within each of their centers. RCS is staffed by multi-disciplinary teams consisting of a team leader, an office manager, and one or more counselors. Dependent on the local Veteran population need, the centers may be staffed with an LPMHC, MFT, social worker or psychologist for family counseling.

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The Office of Academic Affiliation (OAA) maintains a policy of not funding training positions for new disciplines unless it is deemed necessary or a national standard. It has been determined that at this time there is not a need to set up a training program for this discipline, however, should the need arise in the future OAA will work closely with the Mental Health Service to implement such a program.

I hope your meeting with RCS on April 3, 2012, was helpful in addressing your concerns. I appreciate your concerns and suggestions.

I appreciate your continuing support of our mission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Petzel". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Robert A. Petzel, M.D.