The Vocabulary, Rationale and Critiques of Professional Credentialing

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Feature Articles [3]
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Editor’s Note:

When Sarah Jane Rehnborg, Ph.D., wrote her doctoral dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh, she not only fulfilled an academic requirement but also helped document the basis of the new “Certified in Volunteer Administration” (CVA) competency-based credential for the Association of Volunteer Administration. In this issue of e-Volunteerism, we present an updated chapter from Rehnborg’s previously unpublished dissertation, “Field Test and Assessment of a Certification Program for Administrators of Volunteers.”

In this important work, Rehnborg takes readers behind the scenes of the credentialing process. She defines the key terms and extensive vocabulary used when discussing credentialing – terms like professional credentialing, licensure, certification, accreditation and diplomas. She also provides a history and rationale for certification in occupations and professions, as well as a brief overview of the ongoing objections to this practice. Rehnborg’s work, which has been reviewed and updated for current applicability in several countries, provides important documentation of a sometimes complicated and misunderstood topic.

Credentialing is the generic term referring to “the formal recognition of or technical competence” (USHEW, 1977, p. 4). It takes many forms, so it is necessary to first define several vocabulary terms used in professional credentialing:

- Licensure
- Voluntary licensure
- Registration
- Certification
- Qualification(s) and Diplomas
- Accreditation

The logic to this sequence relates to the descending degree of legal control of the credentials awarded to individuals.

While the definitions that follow draw upon American sources and laws, they generally hold true throughout most English-speaking countries in the world. We have asked colleagues in Canada, England and Australia to review this article; they confirmed that these basic concepts and terms also apply in their countries, but any modification or clarification they felt was necessary is noted in each section along with additional terms they identified as important to this international discussion of credentialing. We invite journal readers to expand any of the definitions presented here, and suggest still more terms relevant in their country or field, so that we can discuss this subject with a global perspective.

Licensure and Voluntary Licensure

The most well-known and established method of credentialing is the act of licensure.

Licensure is the

process by which an agency of government grants permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation upon findings that the applicant has attained the minimal degree of competency necessary to ensure that the public health, safety, and welfare will be reasonably protected (USHEW, 1977, p. 4).

As a legal mechanism, licensing laws provide the states with the power to police the various
professions and occupations they regulate (Roemer, 1974). Licensing laws designate entry requirements related to personal qualifications (age, citizenship, residence, character) and to educational qualifications (course requirements, experience, attendance at approved programs, examinations). In addition, licensing laws contain the definition of the scope of functions accorded the occupation.

Mandatory provisions require all who desire to practice a given occupation be licensed and excludes all those from practice who not meet the requirement. Many of the health-related professions, most notably physicians and dentists, fall within this category.

By contrast, voluntary licensing laws, sometimes known as governmental certification, do not forbid practice of the profession by non-licensed personnel. Persons attaining the requirements stipulated in voluntary licensure may practice using the title, insignia or other verification of their status. Non-licensed persons are barred from using such designations.

The majority of the literature on professional credentialing focuses on licensure and its ramifications. Though not specifically stated, there seems to be an implicit assumption that a move towards voluntary certification enters an occupation on the road toward mandatory licensure.

Usage in the UK

Rob Jackson [5], who reviewed this article from a British perspective, commented:

We wouldn’t use this term quite as described here. The concept of being ‘licensed’ or a ‘licence holder’ would be more familiar, e.g. a licensed physiotherapist. It’s also interesting that, to us, a licensee would commonly be understood to be someone running an establishment selling alcoholic beverages, such as a pub.

While the UK (and most other countries) requires certain occupations and establishments to obtain a license to offer a range of services to the public, the “average citizen” in the UK is very likely to connect the word “licensee” with alcohol, as explained by the intricate alcohol licensing laws of the United Kingdom [6].

Registration

Registration represents a form of credentialing frequently more similar to licensure in practice than to professional certification. It most frequently connotes the actual listing of names in a register, by an agency or association, when an individual has achieved certain standards or completed a specialized training program. As with registered nurses, registered dieticians and registered occupational therapists, the credential is a legally mandated requirement for the public performance of the chose occupation.

Certification

Certification is an act which applies to persons, but is essentially voluntary and nongovernmental in nature. Certification is “the process by which a nongovernmental agency or association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications specified by that agency or association” (USHEW, 1977, p. 4). Standards by which a person becomes certified vary greatly among professional groups, but common requirements include membership in the professional association, satisfactory performance on a written performance examination, and the completion of a specified program of study. Peer colleagues regulate the standards and, in most cases, award the certificate. Achieving certification means public recognition of the individual for possessing specified skills at a prescribed level of performance (Bratton and Hildebrand, 1980).

Professional certification should not be confused with teacher education certification. The latter is actually a misnomer; it is a licensing mechanism regulated by a legal body (Griffith & Marcus, 1978). State governments require teachers to hold a valid certificate within a specified period of time in order to teach or continue teaching within the public school system. In effect, teacher education certification within the public education system is more akin to licensure than to certification. In the UK, a teacher must be a graduate with a bachelor of education degree or have passed a PGSE (Post Graduate Certificate of Education).

Certificates

Particularly for the field of volunteer administration, it is important to note further that there is
significant difference between certification and the awarding of a certificate following the completion of a course of study. Earning a certificate validates that an individual has completed a specified number of hours of education; the certificate is conferred solely by the institution or conference offering that particular program. It may be earned by successfully fulfilling all course requirements or even passing an examination, or it may simply acknowledge attendance at all classes.

In the UK, this type of certificate would mainly connote the latter, simply verifying number of hours attended. To complicate the language a bit more, the British have a level of “qualification” (see next section) called “an educational certificate,” which is specific to their occupational credentialing system only.

Unlike the other forms of credentialing discussed here, there is no intent to obtain outside verification of the education or training, whether by peer or governmental review, and certificates are independent of one another. Certificate programs are offered in many places and each does, indeed, attempt to codify and teach the essential elements of the profession - but in a vacuum. A certificate from one school is not necessarily comparable to that of another school; all elements of the training vary widely, without consistency of curriculum, faculty qualifications, hours of study, or ways of entering or successfully completing the coursework.

“Certification” and earning a “certificate” are often confused by volunteer management practitioners. For purposes of personal professional development and building a resume, earning one or more certificates can certainly be useful. But if the field is seeking a more widely accepted certificate based on a common understanding of the expectations and expertise required in volunteer management, such an award would be better served if externally determined and reviewed.

Qualification(s) and Diplomas

The *Penguin English Dictionary* (British edition) provides the generic meaning of “qualification” as a “quality or skill that makes a person suitable for a particular task or appointment,” which would be common usage in all English-speaking countries. However, qualification has a distinctive, formal meaning in the United Kingdom which the same dictionary explains as: “An official record that a person has completed a course or passed an examination.” Rob Jackson further explains:

> Normally this would apply to school, college or university courses (i.e., academic qualifications) although we do have vocational qualifications such as the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ).

> If I went into the street and asked people what their qualifications were, this is the meaning that would be most immediately used and the sense in which they’d respond. Both meanings might be applied by someone if I asked them what qualified them for a particular role (paid or volunteer).

*Wikipedia* does a nice job of defining NVQs like this:

> National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are work-based awards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland that are achieved through assessment and training. In Scotland they are known as Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ).

> To achieve an NVQ, candidates must prove that they have the ability (competence) to carry out their job to the required standard. NVQs are based on National Occupational Standards [7] that describe the 'competencies' expected in any given job role. Typically, candidates will work towards an NVQ that reflects their role in a paid or voluntary position. For example someone working in an administrative office role may take an NVQ in Business and Administration.

> There are five levels of NVQ ranging from Level 1, which focuses on basic work activities, to Level 5 for senior management.

Several organizations in the UK offer [NVQs in volunteer management][8], including Skills Third Sector, which offers explanatory information on its Web site.

Jackson reports that NVQs are most commonly sought after in occupations generally more vocational in nature and not needing university courses – hairdressing, for example – as a university degree would, itself, be considered an important qualification for most professions (e.g., law, teaching, etc.). However, NVQs require an external awarding body, which is what
makes them more like the American concept of certification. In a 2001 report by Pat Gay, *Bright Future: Developing Volunteer Management*, published by the Institute for Volunteering Research in London, volunteer management practitioners surveyed regarded NVQs “as being a middle path between highly structured management studies and picking up skills along the way” (p.19). In the same study, Gay summarized:

Some participants were much more positive about the value of qualifications than others... it was pointed out that people who run, manage and co-ordinate... functions [equivalent to running a small business] need and should have some kind of formal training which would lead to recognised qualification. This should not necessarily be at degree level but should include training on how to manage people, personnel and finance issues, some overall knowledge of the different aspects of what they are doing and some form of accreditation for it... For those who took a negative view, there seemed to be an assumption that acquisition and possession of ‘bits of paper’ would come to dominate the work and determine who could or could not work as a VM.

And in Australia...
We are not quite finished here. Australia has its [Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)](9), the “national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training.” The ACF, introduced in 1995, connects higher education, vocational education, and training, with a range of stakeholders including industry, unions, professional associations, and licensing authorities. The Australians have 10 distinct levels of qualifications (see illustration), using the language of *certificate* and *degree* and adding a specific use of the word *diploma*. The levels are: Certificate I to IV, Diploma, Advanced Diploma/Associate Degree, Bachelor Degree, a cluster of graduate certificates and diplomas, Masters Degree and Doctoral Degree. For those who want to read all the details, a 110-page *AFQ guidebook* (10) was published in July 2011.

![ Playoff of Australian Qualifications Framework](image)

**Accreditation**

Another credential, not to be confused with any of the above, is *accreditation*. Generally considered a voluntary practice, accreditation in the United States is a form of recognition awarded to programs or institutions, not persons. As defined in the *Federal Register* (1974, cited by Accreditation and Institutional Eligibility, 1975):

“Accrediting” means the process whereby an agency or association grants public recognition to a school, institute, college, university, or specialized program of study which meets certain established qualifications and educational standards, as determined through initial and periodic evaluations. The essential purpose of the accreditation process is to provide a professional judgment as to the quality of the educational
institution or program(s) offered, and to encourage continual improvement thereof (p. 8).

In higher education, accreditation is voluntary self-regulation of professional preparation by peers. Following a guided exercise in extensive institutional self-study, a visiting team of professional colleagues reviews and validates the exercise and the institution as attaining certain established standards. In other fields, external accreditation assures the public that accepted standards have been met, one example being scientific testing laboratories.

Accreditation, particularly of educational institutions, is also common practice in a range of other countries, including Australia, the UK and Canada. It should be noted, however, that in all the English-speaking countries, the word “accredited” is sometimes incorrectly applied to individuals. This generally occurs when referring to someone who has successfully completed the courses or exams provided by an accredited institution, migrating the word inaccurately to the graduate of such a program.

For many years in the United States, the Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) added to the list of terms by “endorsing” educational programs in volunteer management rather than accrediting them.

**Renewal of Certification**

Professional credentialing claims to protect the public from the incompetent aspiring professional. It is, therefore, equally important that the public be protected from the incompetent practicing, credentialed professional as well. In 1977, the Public Health Service responded to concern about the renewal of certification and licensure:

Certification organizations, licensure boards and professional associations should adopt requirements and procedures that will assure the continued competence of health personnel. Additional studies of the best mechanisms to assure continued competence should be supported on a high-priority basis. . .

Instead of endorsing a single method such as continuing education, which itself is often unvalidated or of questionable relevance to continued competence, PHS urges that additional support be given to the development of more sophisticated approaches to continued competence which ultimately can be tied into a mandatory recertification or relicensure requirement. These approaches may include peer review through Professional Standards Review Organizations, reexamination, self-assessment techniques and supervisory assessments, as well as continuing education (USHEW, 1977, pp. 13, 17).

**The Trend toward Credentialing**

A 1969 United States Department of Labor (USDOL) study reported that almost 5,000 different licenses were granted across the country for all professional and occupational groups. Licensing impacts the economy substantially. In 1976, it was estimated that a third to a fifth of the work force is directly affected by licensing laws (“Pressure Builds,” 1976); the 2002 section on “Occupational Licensing” [11] in The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics continues to use these estimates. Business Week (“How Licensing Hurts,” 1977) published USDOL statistics suggesting that 25 percent of the employed labor force in some states is composed of licensed practitioners. Likewise, in 1969, it was estimated 10 percent of the national income of the United States originated in occupationally licensed labor markets (Carroll & Gaston, 1977, cited by Hogan, 1980).

The size and scope of the practice is matched only by its levity. Listed in the Department of Labor's (1969) occupations requiring a license are athletic exhibition agents, astrologers, photographers, aerial horse hunters, alligator hunters, bedding cleaners, ice cream buyers, cactus plant agents and rainmakers! The growth of certification programs parallels the proliferation of licensure. While overall figures are unavailable, Ernst and Ernst (1976) and studied 31 different certification programs credentialing management consultants alone.

Tens of hundreds of statutory provisions require occupational licensure and a multitude of groups offer professional certificates. Why?

The most prominent defense of professional credentialing is presented in the definition already provided of licensure: protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public.
At issue in this line of reasoning is the rationale that the technical knowledge required of the professional is beyond the ability of the average layperson to adequately judge. The public can be protected from poor service only if those who meet designated requirements are permitted to practice.

Considered the most powerful tool of any organized group in attaining and maintaining the professional status of its members, the act of certification or licensure serves to define and develop a field of occupational practice (Eboch, 1969) and to protect the field from undue interference by people who are not properly trained (Grad, 1974). Traditionally viewed as a positive societal symbol, prestige accrues to the certificate holder, the profession, and the overseeing association. By providing a hiring criterion for employers, the holder acquires a sense of economic security and a competitive advantage in the marketplace (Grad, 1974). For new, emerging professions, certification demands the definition of the scope of the field and required expertise of the practitioner.

The proposition that professional obsolescence, or the time period during which the academic knowledge and the professional competence of a graduating professional decrease its original strength and potency by 50 percent, provides a persuasive argument for professional credentialing. In 1940, the half-life of the professional competence of a graduating engineer was approximately 12 years; by 1974, it was less than five years. Reduction in professional efficiency due to rapidly changing and expanding information, and the documented reticence of practicing professionals to stay abreast of current developments in their field of practice, has further encouraged the trend toward professional credentialing and the mandatory continuing professional education of some certified and licensed practitioners.

**Opposing Views**

Counterbalancing each theory advocating for the development of credentialing, a scathing critique can be found. In the space of one paragraph, Rockhill (1976) demolishes professional credentialing because of its outcomes:

> The negative consequences of certification (sic) have been well documented. In the United States, certification serves to: (1) define social class status; (2) sort and select out people for jobs or to join the ranks of the unemployed; (3) determine who will have access to knowledge; (4) increase public dependence upon the services of experts; (5) perpetuate a vast educational enterprise directed at turning out certificate-holders rather than educated individuals; and (6) limit our civil liberties as we are forced to submit to certain rituals or professional services which may not be of our choosing (p. 8).

Growing public skepticism has even surfaced in comic strips. The following is an episode from "The Wizard of Id." Rodney, the king's right-hand knight, drags a scruffy peasant before the throne and announces: "We caught this fraud practicing medicine without a license!" The obviously puzzled king responds: "So why bother me? Sell him a license.”

While each occupation has specific issues with which to grapple, there are a number of generic critiques with relevance to volunteer management.

**Establishing Standards**

The methodology governing the development of licensure and certification rules and regulations has, at best, been characterized as "haphazard, uncoordinated and chaotic" (Shimberg et al., 1973, p. 1). Generally, applicants are required to meet certain educational standards, to have specified amounts of experience, to complete a written and/or oral examination and to fulfill various other personal requirements. In some cases, these personal qualifications involve age, residence, citizenship and professional association membership. Furthermore, licensure boards frequently hold wide latitude in the interpretation of eligibility requirements, fee schedules, preparation of qualifying examinations, and scope of professional practice.

The impact of these requirements on the level of practitioner competence defies demonstration (Kessel, 1970; Rockhill, 1976; Shimberg, et al., 1973). Direct empirical research is relatively unavailable. Substantial indirect evidence exists indicating a poor relationship between standard credentialing practices and quality of service.

Even the American Medical Association (AMA, 1971: 30), in a statement approved by the House of Delegates in 1971, concluded that:
Possession of a license in itself does not directly bear upon professional competence.... In its bureaucratic context, licensure lags well behind the state of current practice ...[and as] an organizational process, it is costly and difficult to implement and continuous surveillance of standards is negligible (cited in Hogan, 1980; pp. 10-II).

A host of subsequent studies evaluating the current knowledge and level of care by certified physicians revealed serious deficiencies in the quality of practice.

Testing measures are further identified as undermining the basis and premise of professional credentialing practices. Having assessed a wide range of research, McClelland (1973) asserts that academic grades predict nothing but future grades or results on tests similar to those used in establishing grades. Even in jobs such as scientific research and other positions requiring high intellectual and technical ability, success cannot be predicted by grades in college (Taylor, Smith & Ghiselin, 1963). A sophisticated analysis of admission procedures to MBA programs, conducted by a research psychologist at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton (Crooks, 1977), concluded "traditional admission criteria such as grades and admissions test scores, while they are related to success in graduate school, have no relation to success in business careers" (p. 4).

There are more criticisms of existing testing practices. Examination procedures often lag behind currently acceptable professional practices and standards. Little, if any, consideration is given to assisting those for whom English is a second language. Most licensing exams are usually written, requiring extensive recall of a wide range of facts that may or may not be important to good practice. Few are developed with assistance from experts in measurement and little has been given to standardization, validity or reliability.

In order to initiate a new or dramatically revised professional credential, some associations have awarded their credential to certain individuals not required to either sit for the organization's examination or to fulfill other extant requirements. This practice of "grandparenting" protects the practitioners working at the time who may not possess the credentials necessary to meet the new standards and launches the new program with a relatively large body of certificate holders, although this is defended by the assertion that "if grandfathering gets a program started, and the program can keep going, all of the 'grandfathers' eventually will be deceased or retired. It might be considered a long-term temporary problem" (Ernst and Ernst, 1976, p. 4). Still, there is a danger of developing a caste system of those who earned their recognition and those who "fell into" it. These two groups are not distinguishable to the public in terms of certificate awarded, yet lead to skepticism among practitioners.

**Disciplinary Actions and Procedural Concerns**

Keeping up with the holders of a particular certificate is a much different matter than issuing the initial certificate. Holders move, change jobs and enter other fields without notifying the professional association awarding the credential. Many associations have minimal or no renewal requirements, magnifying this nightmare.

Record keeping deficiencies impinge on the ability to administer disciplinary actions, especially as applied to certification. Based on its study of consultant credentialing bodies, Ernst and Ernst (1976) found that once certified, it becomes difficult not only to maintain accurate records of the certificate holders but nearly impossible to revoke a certificate.

Most organizations will revoke a certificate once granted if false information is given in application, if the holder is found in severe violation of a code of ethics, or if the holder commits a felony. Yet even in these events, how does an association revoke a piece of paper, or guarantee that the disciplined recipients do not continue to represent themselves as certified to an unknowing public? This issue is handled by various associations by awarding certificates with an expiration date and prescribing recertification requirements to be met before a new certificate is issued.

Yet another issue is that most licensing boards and certifying bodies perform the dual role of establishing the qualifications for licensure and then of assessing the qualifications and competence of the applicant. The same board also adjudicates disputes between the public and members of the regulated group, and between the disenfranchised member and the group to which he/she wishes to belong. The implications of being judge, jury and legal counsel have reached the courts.

Occupational credentialing has been challenged in the United States from the perspective of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution, which collectively state that no person may be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law. A broad
interpretation of the due process of law clause was raised by a group of licensed optometrists in the case of Gibson v. Berryhill, 1972 when charges were brought against the optometrists the Alabama Board of Optometry. The plaintiffs argued they would be deprived of their license, and therefore deprived of their right to practice their profession, if censured by a board that "was biased and could not provide them with a fair and impartial hearing in conformity with due process of law." Although the Supreme Court returned the case to a lower court, it recognized the bias of the Board and the fact that it could not constitutionally proceed against the optometrists. The Court's willingness to review occupational licensing situations, and the reality that many licensing boards and certification agencies are composed of practitioners from within the field they are regulating, marks the significance of this case.

Beyond the organizational and procedural problems lies the general reticence of the professions to act on disciplinary matters. Nadar and Green (1976, cited by Hogan, 1980) confirms that only 350 of the nation's 380,000 practicing lawyers were disciplined in 1972. Similar figures exist for physicians. Only 161 license suspensions and 334 revocations, out of some quarter million physicians, occurred in the five-year period from 1963 through 1967 (Derbyshire, 1969). In nearly 50 percent of these cases, board action was somewhat redundant as the offense was a narcotics violation actionable under criminal law.

One explanation offered for this minimal level of sanctioning is that

> . . . in the process of developing regulatory schemes, the interests of the established professional groups are typically protected more vigilantly than those of the public. In practice the ethics of the profession itself may, in the final analysis, be the controlling factor in protecting the public interest, for a common characteristic of the descriptions professions give of themselves is the inclusion of a statement expressing dedication to serving the client (Griffith and Marcus, 1978, p. 55).

**Discriminatory Practices**

Professional credentialing practices have been charged with the tendency to discriminate against minorities, women, the aged and the poor (Hogan, 1980; Kasper, 1977; Mackin, 1976; Rockhill, 1976; Shimberg et al., 1973), demonstrated by the continuing lack of proportionate representation of these populations in key professions.

The equal opportunity guidelines developed by the Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Commission (EEOC) were intended for the typical employment situation, which is considerably different from the licensing situation. Whereas the typical employer hires a group of persons and may obtain feedback on their performance, the licensing board certifies the individual, who then may work for various employers in widely scattered locations. The task of validating a licensing exam is formidable, particularly as considerable variation exists between the work place and the work task of each licensed employee.

Because licensure is frequently a prerequisite to employment in numerous occupational areas, the potential implications of EEOC guidelines can be quite real and various court cases have challenged both academic and certification prerequisites. “It could be that the courts may someday declare that alternatives to institutional certification – such as demonstrated competency on the job or on a proficiency test – must be accepted in lieu of stipulated amounts of formal training” (Shimberg, et al., 1973, p. 206).

> In essence the argument for the existence of discrimination is rather simple. It runs as follows. If academic credentials are required for entry into a profession, and if these credentials are not valid or reliable measures of competence, and if minorities, women, the poor, and the aged have greater-than-normal difficulty in obtaining these credentials, then it is reasonable to assume that discrimination has taken place (whether intentional or not). (Hogan, 1980)

While standards are set with the intention of ensuring competent practitioners, the net effect may not support this promise. Advanced graduate degrees, restrictive administration of licensing exams, and arbitrary fees tend to restrict the flow of practitioners. Those excluded from the ranks of the licensed are forced into lower-preference occupations and there is strong evidence that restrictions tend to fall disproportionately on minorities (Kasper, 1977; Macklin, 1976; Shimberg et al., 1973).

A less obvious financial implication of licensure practices relates to emergence of new occupational groups, such as paraprofessionals and the introduction of less-expensive technologies. Through the extremely broad definitions of those practices restricted to fully licensed practitioners, and by making no provision, or very rigid and narrow provisions for
delegating functions to others, licensing laws unnecessarily limit the role of paraprofessionals. Further restricting the flow of paraprofessionals are the frequently arbitrary and capricious entry requirements and prerequisites necessary for a professional credential (Hogan, 1980; Shimberg et al., 1973).

Renewal Requirements

Based on the premise that credentialing addresses the problem of professional obsolescence, many groups have selected to mandate continuing professional education. Yet, as with preparatory educational requirements, there is no guarantee that continuing education assures the ongoing competence of the practitioner. Mandating further education rests upon the assumption that education, competence and accountability can be equated. However, the fact that

... education may only partially contribute to competence, and competence be only one component in accountability doesn't matter; a mandatory educational policy assumes that accountability is dependent upon education. Though we may know this isn't true, if we act as though it is, we operate from the same fallacy that underlies the use of formal schooling as a selective device for the world of work. Rather than a means to competency, education becomes the end; alternative ways of developing competence and accountability are looked to less and less (Rockhill, 1981, p. 4).

Despite the limited proven validity of continuing education, it is nonetheless easily formulated and administered on a wide scale.

Inhibiting Change

A more subtle impact of professional credentialing practices is its tendency to inhibit improvements in training, education, professional practice and the organization of services. This accusation is most apparent in the licensure/accreditation relationship. Many applicants aspiring for a professional credential must be graduates of an accredited education program. If a positive correlation existed accredited educational programs and competent practitioners, there would be no problem; however, there is no evidence (Hogan, 1980; Rockhill, 1976) that traditional methods of education produce qualified practitioners.

Experimentation in training is frequently curtailed to conform to the rigid requirements of the accreditation board. Rather than allowing fields of occupational practice to change to meet evolving needs, credentialing shackles new developments to old concepts. Milton Freedman (1962) highlights this concern:

There are many different routes to knowledge and learning and the effect of restricting. . . practice. . . and defining it as we tend to do to a particular group, who in the main have to conform to the prevailing orthodoxy, is certain to reduce the amount of experimentation that goes on and hence to reduce the rate of growth of knowledge in the area (p. 157).

Some Options

The necessary and vital linkage between professional credentialing programs and institutions of higher education is clearly evident and equally challenging. Roemer (1974) suggests that the entire educational policy of professions should be critically analyzed and revamped. Greater breadth of undergraduate training would allow for future career mobility and lateral options. Quality preparation may diminish the necessity for credentialing for entry into occupations.

Appropriate equivalency measures would enhance the role of job-related experiences. Flexibility should be encouraged that would facilitate alterations between periods of work and periods of education. The world of scholarship should be integrated more closely with the world of practice. Examinations which reflect performance competence should be developed. More imaginative and meaningful approaches to continued qualifications should be devised in such a way that continuing education becomes an integral part of the professional's life without the dictates of mandatory participation.

Shimberg, et al. (1973) concur with some of Roemer's suggestions, arguing further for the elimination of unnecessarily stringent experience requirements that have borne no definitive relationship to the practice of the occupation.

Mattran (1976) asks:
Do we try to change society so that the orientation to credentialing no longer exists, or, do we live with the scorecard in [professional] education?

The answer to the first question is easy: We cannot; so don't even bother. Human beings will continue to be human beings. . .

In answer to the second question, it would seem that there is little choice: credentialing is going to be with us in one form or another; so we...ought to make the best of it by ensuring that certification required of practitioners has substance enough to assure those whom we serve that our services are truly of professional calibre. It does not really matter how we go about credentialing – competency based, earned academic credits, diplomas – as long as the effect of this effort encourages and rewards excellence (p. 306).

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