

And the Psychologist said, “MAC Please!”

By Nancy A. Piotrowski, PhD, MAC, NCC AP Commissioner

It is no surprise to anyone reading this magazine that NAADAC is committed to upholding high ethical and practice standards for addictions care. This is achieved through care providers receiving education, testing, and recognition through certification and credentials. What you might not realize however, is that a sister organization in addictions also has a long history of doing the same thing.

Between 2001 and February 2018, the American Psychological Association (APA) through its practice organization (APAPO), was doing this same kind of work for psychologists working in addiction. Through a mechanism called a Certificate of Proficiency, licensed psychologists with relevant training experiences were eligible to sit for an exam to demonstrate their competency to work in the area of substance use treatment. Historically, in line with older versions of diagnostic nosology, it was called a *Certificate of Proficiency in the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders*. Efforts to establish such credentials were created to assist psychologists with meeting demands to document their competency to state agencies, third-party payers, referral sources, and consumers looking for ways to understand provider knowledge and skills to treat addiction.

But to get a certificate, there was a step in between. Someone had to officially define what it meant to be proficient! As such, leaders in the Society of Addiction Psychology (SOAP; <https://addictionpsychology.org>), also known as APA Division 50, sponsored the establishment of such a definition. SOAP leaders worked with co-sponsors in APA Division 28, which focuses on Psychopharmacology and Substance Abuse, along with some other interested parties. And together, psychologists working in addiction wrote a report describing the core psychological knowledge and skills necessary for such proficiency, as well as specific methods for how psychologists gain such experience. Once defined by the sponsors, they presented the report to the APA Committee on the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology (CRSPPP). CRSPPP defines the criteria for recognizing specialties and proficiencies and makes recommendations to the larger body of APA on such decisions. Once approved, proficiency definitions have to be reviewed and reaffirmed approximately every seven years through a renewal process. In its last revision, the Proficiency in the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders was updated to be the Proficiency of Addiction Psychology. It now renewed through 2024. A brief description of it is online (<https://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/alcohol>).

But here is what has changed: the shared history in parallel is now merged for the process of certification. Changes at APA created an

opportunity to bring the certification process to NAADAC. During 2018, the APAPO *Certificate of Proficiency in the Treatment of Alcohol and Other Psychoactive Substance Use Disorders* transitioned to the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCC AP) Master Addiction Counselor (MAC). And so, while NAADAC had previously had psychologists with a MAC, several hundred more are now present. Going forward, SOAP has the responsibility to maintain the definitions of the proficiency with CRSPPP in APA. Additionally, efforts will be

made to look for opportunities to strengthen the MAC in ways that bring benefit for the many different types of professionals who hold it, including licensed psychologists. To this end, NCC AP has added a commissioner who is a licensed psychologist with a MAC, and I am serving in this role.

A benefit with this transition for psychologists is that the MAC has great recognition nationally across a larger number of states that surpasses what was achieved by the prior certificate of proficiency. And while psychologists' scope of practice typically covers work in addictions,

so long as it is supported by appropriate preparation and experience, the MAC provides the added benefit of easy recognition by consumers, for referrals, and by third party payers. In March 2019, Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NAADAC Executive Director, and I attended the annual APA Practice Leadership Convention (PLC) in Washington, DC to talk to psychologists about the MAC. We also held a roundtable discussion with varied state leaders about addictions credentials and other addictions issues. We anticipate continuing these conversations to identify additional opportunities to enhance the value of the MAC for psychologists and to look for more ways to bolster this very strong, shared tradition of continuously raising the quality of addictions treatment services through excellence in training and practice.

REFERENCES

- Proficiency of Addiction Psychology, American Psychological Association Committee on the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology, <https://www.apa.org/ed/graduate/specialize/alcohol>
Society of Addiction Psychology, American Psychological Association Division 50, <https://addictionpsychology.org/>



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