



University of South Australia

# An Introduction to Credentialing Issues in Counselling and Some Main Counselling Groups in Australia

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University of South Australia

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# Event Organised By Nadine Pelling, PhD

- Speakers
  - Credentialing Issues – Nadine Pelling
  - AACCC: Drew Thomas
  - ACA: Philip Armstrong & Peter Papps
  - AGCA: Sally Armstrong-Day & Voula Giannopolous & Royce Herbert
  - CASA (PACFA member association): Margot Schofield & Mara Lashchuk





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# For Further Information

- Australian Association of Career Counsellors
- [www.aacc.org.au](http://www.aacc.org.au)
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- Australian Counselling Association
- [www.theaca.net.au](http://www.theaca.net.au)
- 
- Australian Guidance And Counselling Association
- [www.agca.com.au](http://www.agca.com.au)
- 
- Psychotherapy And Counselling Federation of Australia
- [www.pacfa.org.au](http://www.pacfa.org.au)

# An Overview of Credentialing Issues in Counselling & an Introduction to Some Main Counselling Groups in South Australia



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# Outline

- An overview of credentialing/professional counselling issues - Nadine Pelling
- 4 Counselling Association Introductions
  - 30 minutes maximum for each group to introduce their association and what they have to offer potential members/an overview of their professional activities
    - AACCC – Drew Thomas
    - ACA – Philip Armstrong & Peter Papps
    - AGCA – Sally Armstrong-Day & Voula Giannopolous & Royce Herbert
    - CASA (PACFA member association) – Margot Schofield & Mara Lashchuk
- Please Hold **all** questions until the end of **all** presentations
- You will be encouraged to ask questions on the presentations after all presentations are complete

# Counselling in Australia: An Overview of Credentialing Issues in our Developing Profession

Nadine Pelling, Ph.D.  
University of South Australia

- Credentialing and professionalism are linked
- In order to discuss credentialing one must first discuss what is meant by the term profession

# Profession

- A profession is a developed occupation that . . .
  - Has a specialised body of knowledge and theory driven research
  - Has an established professional society or association
  - Controls training programs
  - Has a code of ethics
  - Has standards for admitting and policing practitioners
  - Is organised for the performance of its duties and is self regulating



# Is Australian Counselling: A Profession?

- We have a **Variety** of counselling associations versus
  - **one main counselling** organisation in Australia or
  - a **complete unity** of all of the main influential counselling organisations in Australia
- Various attempts (plural) at self regulation

- Each main association has their own **code of ethics** and **membership requirements** and **practitioner lists**
- Limited body of Australian counselling research
- There is a variety of training available as per AQF guidelines from diploma to doctoral levels

# Is Counselling in Australia: A Profession?

- Yes and no . . . In process of becoming a profession
  - Few professionals talk as much about being professional as those whose professional stature is in doubt
    - And we talk a lot about counselling as a profession in Australia
  - Interested in credentialing issues
    - As any developing profession tends to be as they add respectability

# Defining a Credential and Credentialing

- Professions versus occupations use credentials
- A credential is an official documentation that an individual possesses
  - It generally describes some title, quality, or right
- Offers a way for the public to identify professionals who meet certain levels of knowledge and skills criteria set by the profession
- Said to be for the protection of members and better service of the public
- Assumes that all counsellors must have shared knowledge and certain skills and thus standards of practice

# Australian Credentials

- In Australia many groups have initiated credentialing efforts
- Is this a positive occurrence?
  - There are pro credentialing arguments and anti credentialing arguments

# Pro Credentialing Arguments

- Counselling is unique as a helping profession
  - based on a model of human growth and development versus a medical model of illness
  - facilitative
  - seeks to give its skills, through a counselling relationship, to the bulk of the population
- Currently it is up to the client to assess the competence of a practitioner and to withdraw from incompetent service
  - This places a burden on the consumer
    - especially from hidden dangers not easily assessed by lay people
  - This burden is especially increased when one is in emotional distress or has experienced a personal catastrophe
  - The most vulnerable need to be protected

- Credentialing often gains recognition and repayment from third party payers

# Anti Credentialing Arguments

- Counselling lacks sufficient specificity to secure a role with the public and other professionals
  - one of many helping occupations/professions
    - Psychology, social work, nursing, education, life coaching
- The public has the power to control professionals through refusal to pay for services
- The public at large is not dependent on counselling in the same way it is on other professions such as medicine and thus does not need protection



- All the public needs is information on experience, training, capacity to do work, and fees payable and they can make a decision regarding service
- Prescribed standards may reflect infantilisation of the counsellor by organisations who are placed in a parental role which is antithetical to what counselling is about
- No proof that credentialing protects clients

- Professionalisation movements are driven by their own members who can too easily engage in elevating the profession for their own advancement at the expense of consumers
- Professionals often raise standards and barriers to enter professions
  - Restricts the supply of practitioners
  - Higher standards than necessary
  - Inflating cost of services
  - Makes it difficult for paraprofessionals and volunteers
  - Higher cost of education and training can discriminate against disadvantaged groups
    - Elitism and discrimination result
  - Lack of innovative services due to reimbursement bias
    - uniformity and mediocrity is encouraged as unique services not covered by various forms of credentialing

# Pros/Cons Summary

- Most counsellors support the concept of credentialing but disagree regarding
  - who is doing the controlling
  - what they are trying to control
  - what is to be considered a competency and minimum standard
    - Level of education/experience/qualifications for credentials/membership/membership level

# 3 Main Types of Credentialing

1. Academic program accreditation
2. Certification & Register Lists
3. Statutory Regulation

# 1. Academic Program Accreditation

- Provides standards for training programs
- Involves an association or agency that grants public recognition to a school, institute, private provide, university, or specialised program of study that has met certain established qualifications or standards
- Most support educational standards as society deserves assurance that graduates emerging are competent in various areas
  - Concern regarding which groups have a mandate for determining the appropriateness of a university curriculum and monitoring the quality of design and delivery

- There is no widely accepted evidence that professionally trained therapists are more effective than paraprofessionals
- Others indicate that competence comes from innate ability and lived experience
- Generally noted that high levels of academic training in counselling are not necessary to provide the kind of interpersonal relationship needed for counselling success
- BUT As inadequate as it may be, training standards are the best measure of competence we have

- Some academics indicate that accreditation can stifle innovations in education and training as programs are preoccupied with meeting accreditation standards
- Accreditation also generally overlooks the research components needed for a body of knowledge
  - A requirement of a profession

## 2. Certification & Register Lists

- Voluntary
  - becomes defacto equivalent to statutory if popular enough with the public
- Certification is title control as it grants recognition of competence but does not confer authority to practice
  - seen to promote public welfare but lacks exclusionary restrictions
- Certification generally documents education, experience, and skills and it offers prestige and identification to consumers



- Being on a register list is similar to certification in that it is a recognition of competence but a title is not specifically controlled (voluntarily)
- Register listing identifies to the consumer professional practitioners who provide service
- Register listing/certification of members in a profession brings with it a barrier between those on a register/certified and those not
  - as it encourages public use of services of some professionals and reduces the amount of service provided by others
    - The ACA, PACFA, Psychotherapy in Australia, and others have lists of practitioners and supervisors

# 3. Statutory Regulation

- A credential controlled by the government that regulates either the title or practice or both of an professional group
- Often opposed due to concerns over restraint of trade
- Are enacted to protect public but also benefit the profession via enhanced public image and recognition
- Not a likely form of credential in Australian Counselling in the near future
  - Self regulation a preferred model at the moment

# Australian Credentialing Efforts

- Tonight you are going to hear from 4 of the main counselling groups in South Australia
- Some of these groups (or their parent associations) are involved with
  - academic accreditation
  - certification/register lists

- Having a variety of credentialing efforts in existence at one time can be confusing to counsellors and consumers
- Students and counsellors often ask me  
“What counselling group/register should I join?”

- I never suggest any one association as I believe that would be inserting myself into Australian counselling politics unnecessarily
- Instead I provide information on various counselling associations and suggest that individuals investigate their counselling association options and join an association (or associations) that meet their career needs
  - Trusting the ability of adult learners and professionals to choose group memberships and representation that suits their needs
    - This is the main reason for this information session and my writings on Australian Counselling

- While I do not seek to influence which counselling associations students and counsellors join I do seek to influence the developing profession and credentialing of counselling in Australia by making a few suggestions

- Specifically regarding credentialing issues I suggest
  - First, A systematic and comprehensive credentialing plan be developed by **ALL** the main counselling associations in Australia in a collaborative manner
    - Acknowledging that a variety of credentials and education levels may be needed for counselling to meet the needs of the Australian population
  - Failing such collaboration, **Reciprocal Recognition** on the various certification/register lists created by the various counselling associations in Australia
- This would, of course, require official meetings and discussions regarding credentialing
  - Formal agreements
  - Communication Accords
- As a result, Professional associations need to work together and use good communication skills upon which collaboration can be built

Counselling organisations can use their counselling skills to benefit the profession of counselling and counselling consumers in Australia



For further information on this topic  
and others please see:

A Special Issue of the  
***International Journal of Psychology*** on  
**Counselling in Australia**

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[www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/00207594.asp](http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/00207594.asp)

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# DVD NOW AVAILABLE

If you missed the May 6, 2005, talk on *Credentialing Issues in Counselling and a Brief Introduction to Some Main Counselling Groups in Australia* you can now borrow a copy of the event through the UniSA School of Psychology Testing Library. Please contact the main office on +61 8 8302 1479. The DVD will also soon be made available through the main UniSA library system contact UniSA via [www.unisa.edu.au](http://www.unisa.edu.au) for details.