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CREDENTIALING - CERTIFICATION - CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS:

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

The terms "credentialing", "certification", and "certificate programs", and can be a source of confusion for health care professionals. Let's take a look at the nuances in meaning that relate to the professional credential that NC-CME is developing for persons in the CME field.

The National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA), of which NC-CME is a member, offers a number of publications for purchase that address these terms and offers definitions and explanations of their differences. In addition, the following NOCA publications are available for downloading without charge from www.NOCA.org

The NOCA Basic Guide to Credentialing Terminology (PDF file) © 2006 NOCA

The NOCA Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts (PDF file) © 2005 NOCA

Here are some definitions of commonly used terms, adapted from NOCA publications and used with permission:

Credentialing is the umbrella term that includes the concepts of accreditation, licensure, registration, and professional certification. Credentialing grants formal recognition to individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria. The credentialing process is essentially a method for maintaining quality standards of knowledge and performance, and in some cases, for stimulating *continued self-improvement*. Credentialing confers occupational *identity*.

Certification is a process by which individuals are assessed against predetermined standards for knowledge/skills/competencies and granted a time-limited credential. The primary purpose of certification is assessment and the assessment process is independent of a specific course of study or any education/course/curriculum provider.

Professional certification is the voluntary process by which a non-governmental entity grants a time-limited recognition and use of a credential to an individual after verifying that he or she has met predetermined and standardized criteria. It is the vehicle that a profession or occupation uses to differentiate among its members, using standards, sometimes developed through a consensus driven process, based on existing legal and psychometric requirements. \ Understanding Credentialing Concepts

Certificate programs While the following may be considered by some to be types of credentialing processes, these certificate programs are not held to the objective standards required of the other types of credentialing programs:

A certificate program is a training program on a topic for which participants receive a certificate after attendance and/or completion of the coursework. Some programs also require successful demonstration of attainment of the course objectives.

An assessment-based certificate program is a relatively short, non-degree granting program that provides instruction and training to aid participants in acquiring knowledge/skills/competencies and designates that participants have passed an end-of-program assessment derived from the learning/course objectives. Although assessment is an integral part of a certificate program, the primary purpose of this type of program is to provide instruction and training.

In addition to the differentiating characteristics described above, four major criteria distinguish a **professional credentialing examination** (for certification, licensure or registration) from an end-of-course examination:

1. A professional role delineation or job analysis is conducted and periodically validated.
2. A demonstration of how the examination is linked to a defined body of knowledge, based on the professional role delineation or job analysis, is provided.
3. A demonstration of reliability and validity of the examination, based on psychometrically accepted statistical methods, is provided.
4. A minimum passing score is developed using psychometrically accepted statistical methods.

To follow the progress that NC-CME has made in developing this professional credentialing initiative, go to “Milestones” in the *NEWSbrief* section of the website.
