

CERTIFICATION IN CANADA



In our January and September issues, we featured two articles by Dr. Greg Anderson on the current state and future prospects of certification for fitness professionals in Canada. We received the following responses from our readers. Further responses are encouraged. *FBC* will continue to support any individual or group efforts to improve certification standards and organization.

WHAT ABOUT NFLAC'S GUIDELINES AND STANDARDS?

I am a subscriber to *FBC*, and I thoroughly enjoy your magazine. After reading the articles on "Certification and Training in Canada," I was quite surprised that none of the authors mentioned the National Fitness Leadership Advisory Council (NFLAC) Guidelines and Per-

formance Standards that were published in the mid-1990s. The federal government coordinated various experts in our profession to establish Guidelines for a variety of courses (e.g. personal training, group exercise, older adults, youth fitness, aqua fitness, etc.). More specific Performance Standards were also created for both personal training and group exercise. Both the Guidelines and Performance Standards were designed to promote consistency between the various organizations offer-

ing training courses. Although funding was terminated to NFLAC in the early 2000s, the Guidelines still exist.

I have a bachelor's in physical education and have taken four different personal training certifications over the past 20 years. I was quite amazed at how different each certification course was and even more amazed at how each organization uses different standards.

When I was approached to offer personal training courses for both the YMCA and Algonquin College, I decided to use the NFLAC Guidelines and Performance Standards for Personal Trainers so that the course content and evaluation procedures (written and practical) met national standards. It's too bad that other organizations don't follow these NFLAC guidelines.

Albert Guite
Ottawa, Ontario

MORE ON NFLAC STANDARDS

I would like to commend Dr. Anderson on his well-researched article "Certification Confusion" and add additional commentary regarding certification of Canadian group exercise leaders.

As a consultant with Fitness Canada in the 70s and 80s, I had the wonderful opportunity to work with Director Sandy Keir, Dr. Richard Lauzon, Dr. Blake Ferris, Peggy Edwards and the late Mall Peepre who all saw the need to address the training and development of group exercise leaders in Canada.

Towards that end, the National Fitness Leadership Advisory Council of Canada (NFLAC) was established with representatives from the provincial fitness organizations, the YM-YWCA and the colleges and universities that offered fitness leader training and development. As the Council evolved, opportunities arose for private organizations to join.

A comprehensive set of Performance Standards for the training and development of group exercise leaders and a national theory exam was created. These criteria created a common standard to compare and assess leaders nationally and created a system of "transferability of certification" throughout the country – the first of its kind worldwide. More importantly, the Canadian fitness industry had established a minimal benchmark to measure competencies.

Although NFLAC was dissolved af-

ter the loss of federal funding, the council members continue to offer its training and certification services using the past NFLAC resources.

Some argued that the Performance Standards represented the common ground of differing political interests of the council members and that, therefore, the Standards were set too low. However, the Council has always advertised these criteria as minimal standards for safe and effective leadership practices.

Dr. Anderson argues that "it is time to lobby Health Canada to take an active role in setting standards...by providing a framework for inclusion of fitness professionals into provincial health legislation." He further argues that these standards should be established by an "independent professional body."

Although I agree that we should lobby Health Canada for funding, I believe that the industry can best serve Canadians by policing adherence to our existing standards, revising them as needed and creating additional standards for other practitioners (such a personal trainers) with input from well-established delivery agencies/organizations.

Let's not re-invent the wheel. Let's grease it, and get it rolling again.

Pierre Chartier

*President, Fit Accompli Consulting Ltd.
Professor, Algonquin College*

CREATE STANDARDS COLLABORATIVELY

Can-Fit-Pro supports the development of standards for all fitness professionals, including many of the ideas presented by Dr. Anderson.

While all fitness professionals should be encouraged to pursue higher education, we are troubled by a scenario where our industry might marginalize those with less than a university education. This position would immediately compromise the jobs of a great number of professionals in the industry, creating an even larger gap between current supply and demand for competent staff. This would result in a decrease in supervised physical activity on the part of Canadians, something no one wants.

Can-Fit-Pro agrees that the development of standards for fitness certification should be achieved through an inclusive, collaborative process including all industry stakeholders. However, as Health Canada has already sent the message that they question the value of standards (by terminating funding to

NFLAC), we feel that standards can be developed by and for the stakeholders themselves. Given the collaboration of all of the stakeholders, these standards will lead to the inclusion of the fitness professional as part of the allied health professional chain, thereby elevating our collective value in the eyes of consumers.

The benefits of creating standards with input from all stakeholders are best examined by considering each group on its own merits existing within the larger social and economic system.

- Consumers will benefit from an increased quality of services and from increased safety while partaking in activity physician or fitness professional.

- Independent fitness professionals will gain greater employability and ability to demand higher fees.

- Fitness clubs will benefit from an improved image of professionalism for their services and the staff that delivers them and an increased demand for services stemming from referrals from health professionals.

- Fitness certification organizations will benefit by gaining credibility once they have met the minimum standards set by industry stakeholders. They will be able to distinguish themselves by specializing in areas that go beyond the minimum standards. This will provide consumers with a choice of certified fitness professionals who have different educations and areas of expertise but the same foundation.

- Allied health professionals will gain another specialist group with whom they can work, thus improving services to a health care system that most would agree is ailing.

Collaboration is critical in avoiding overemphasizing the interests of any one stakeholder. To openly cultivate the collective development of standards, Can-Fit-Pro invites all interested parties to attend a roundtable discussion at our Toronto 2006 event held the weekend of August 25-27, 2006. The goal of this initiative will be to achieve initial consensus on the minimum standards required to be recognized as a professional in the industry that is mindful of the diverse needs of all the industry's stakeholders.

Stéphane Cova

Certification Director Can-Fit-Pro

Rod Macdonald

Vice-President Can-Fit-Pro

SOME AMERICAN ORGANIZATIONS ACCREDITED BY THIRD-PARTY CERTIFYING AGENCY NCCA

On the fitness industry, the term certification has been incorrectly applied to many continuing education courses. Foundation and continuing education courses are not less valuable than a certification. However, a certificate of completion or a specialty certificate would be a more appropriate designation.

Certification needs to be standardized, and accreditation is key. The industry continues to need a way to quickly and objectively discriminate between the more than 90 different "certifying organizations" and nearly 300 "certification programs" available to the potential professional. The year 2006 will continue to lead us further and further down this path.

Currently the American Council on Exercise and a number of other organizations have been accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), a division of the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA).

The NCCA evaluates the processes and systems used by an organization to identify professional roles and scope of practice, develop exam content and provide proper exam administration and scoring to ensure the following:

- that the examination process is fair and unbiased
- that the examination accurately measures the minimal competence of the candidate for the profession
- that the public is protected from unqualified or ineffective practitioners
- that the organization has the means to support its professionals

It is important to point out that by earning an NCCA-accredited certification, fitness professionals demonstrate that they are qualified to take a legitimate place on the healthcare continuum based on what is usual and customary for healthcare and other professionals. It is critical for developing an appropriate level of professional recognition which should also positively impact compensation levels for those fitness professionals.

Scott Goudeseune

CEO

American Council on Exercise

NCCA ACCREDITS CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS FOR MANY PROFESSIONS

Accreditation is a buzz word in the fitness industry. Many people talk about it, but many do not understand its important role in the certification process.

Weeding through the many professional fitness certifications to find a legitimate credential is challenging, but necessary. Consumers scrutinize the qualifications of their service providers (whether they are nurses, mechanics or financial planners) more than ever before. Safety concerns in fitness activities and the consequences of hiring an unqualified employee make this scrutinizing even more intense.

Club owners, regulatory bodies, and trade associations, including the International Health, Racquet, and Sports Club Association (IHRSA), have turned to accrediting bodies such as the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) for guidance.

NCCA, the accrediting body of the National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA), accredits certification programs based on compliance with

their standards. The NCCA standards are unique because they represent the essential elements of a quality certification program regardless of the profession. Their standards were developed by experts in test development, exam data analysis and program administration.

A recent survey of NCCA-accredited programs shows that programs sought accreditation because they wanted an objective, third-party review of their program to ensure their practices were up-to-date with industry standards. Others looked to NCCA accreditation to demonstrate that their program was legally defensible. Most of the programs said the accreditation enhanced their reputation and that they benefited from public recognition.

Consumers are the key element in the question of whether to seek accreditation or not. They will continue to demand that their fitness professionals are qualified with current knowledge and skills. NCCA-accredited programs address that demand by requiring that they have a recertification program. They must demonstrate that the requirements of the recertification program measure or enhance the continued competence of the certificants.

Wade Delk
Executive Director
National Organization for Competency Assistance

MORE ON NCCA

Personal training is vastly dissimilar to other professions. Since fitness training education is primarily on a non-degree level, it cannot be legitimately standardized "accredited" as degree programs can. Therefore, knowledge and non-degree level education can only be measured through a standardized examination. In fact, with standardized examinations in place, does it really matter which education vehicle the candidate chooses as long as the candidate's minimum knowledge, skills and abilities are tested using valid and governed protocols?

The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), is a third party governing (accrediting) authority. It requires each certifying organization that it governs to provide independently developed minimum-competency exams. Valid exam development starts with the clear definition of the scope of practice. Then, an unbiased third party psychometric company creates an industry survey-based validated exam for that particular scope of practice. Since the same protocols are required of all independent certifying agencies, the resulting exams are overwhelmingly similar. Hence, desirable, widespread, universal and immediate testing standards will be achieved. This newly identified NCCA accrediting body is experienced, respected and recognized by all informed allied health professionals. Relationships between personal trainers and allied health professionals who have confidence in NCCA's governing ability will finally be possible. Confidence in NCCA, will more logically lead to patient referrals for fitness training.

NCCA certification accreditation serves the candidate and protects the public. It requires certifiers to comply with unbiased exam validation procedures, yield to third party governance and accountability and adopt operational protocols that prove graduates have earned and deserve their certification credential. It protects vocations from government regulation indirectly through a legislative "sunrise review" process that identifies NCCA to legislators as an acceptable self-governing standard.

Presently, five U.S. certifying agencies have achieved NCCA accreditation: American Council on Exercise (ACE), National Federation of Professional Trainers (NFPT), National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA), National Council on Strength and Fitness (NCSF) and National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM).

Ron J. Clark
President and CEO
National Federation of Professional Trainers

They Look Healthy, but...

AED PLUS

Sudden Cardiac Arrest can strike any time, any place—even during a workout.

- The first and Only Full-Rescue AED
- Supports the full Chain of Survival
- Real CPR Help™
- CPR-D-padz last four years
- Consumer Lithium Batteries last 5 years
- Highest Protection Rating (IP55)



Is your facility rescue-ready?

To find out how to make your facility rescue ready, call **866-442-1011** or visit us at **www.zoll.com**

ZOLL
Advancing Resuscitation. Today.™