John Duggan: Welcome to the American Counseling Association's Podcast Series. I'm your host, John Duggan. The ACA Governing Council recently passed some important policies focusing on counselor licensure. To help us understand these changes and policies, I've invited Dr. David Kaplan, Chief Professional Officer of the American Counseling Association to help us explore these policies and find out what they mean for us. David, welcome to the program.

Dr. David Kaplan: Well, thanks John. It's a pleasure to be here. These are policies that were passed by the ACA Governing Council this summer, and just so everybody can access them, they are available on the ACA website at counseling.org under the spotlight section along with FAQs that we have written. The policies focus on licensure.

John: Licensure sure is an important question that many members will raise when they call up on the phone and as a licensed counselor, I can appreciate some of their concerns. Could you help break down some of the issues revolving around licensure and give us a better understanding of what's going on?

David: Sure. One aspect is moving forward. For counselors who obtain their license in the future, that ACA supports a CACREP degree for licensure. The policy reads that we endorse support and advocate for graduation from a counselor education program accredited by CACREP or CORE as the pathway to licensure for independent practice. At the same time, the Governing Council wants to protect those who currently have degrees, and who are in the pipeline, students and new professionals.

So at the same time, the policy states that ACA endorses and advocates for licensed professional counselors who are licensed by July of 2020 has qualified independent practitioners with the same professional privileges and practice options as graduates from CACREP and CORE Programs.

Another aspect of the policies looks to which specialties we endorse for licensure, and the policy specifically endorses clinical mental health counseling, clinical rehabilitation counseling, marriage, couple and family counseling, addiction counseling, and school counselors, and other specialties as long as they have clinical course work.

John: Okay, so we're talking about a lot of changes and you've mentioned a couple of organizations: CACREP and CORE. My recent scope of practice has been clinical, and we've always started off by getting a good history when kind of addressing a concern, so can you start by giving us a little bit of history in today's podcast. How do we get here as a profession and what does all this accreditation mean?

David: Sure. The sociologists referred to what we are going through as professionalization and if I can quote a famous sociologist, Ashley Crossman, Dr. Crossman says, “Professionalization is the social process that which any trade or occupation transforms itself into a true profession.” So this is part of the continuation of the normal developmental process of professional counseling developing itself into a profession, and every profession continues to do that on a regular basis or else they
stagnate and die. This process, for counseling, to put this in perspective, this process for counseling has been going on a long time. In fact, it’s been going on for over 100 years and if you can humor me, I can go through just a few of the benchmarks of professionalization that counseling has gone through.

Over 100 years ago, in 1908, our profession was named by Frank Parsons, one little bit of trivia that people might like to know is how counseling got its name and it got its name from Frank Parsons. Frank, Dr. Parsons, was a lawyer by trade and he liked the term that the English used for attorneys, which is counsellor at law, they spelled counsellor with two L’s so we chopped of one of the L’s and called us counselors, and that happened around 1908.

The first professional organization, one of the benchmarks of a profession, that the sociologist talk about that you have professional organizations, and that happened in 1913, first counseling organization was what is now NCDA, the National Career Development Association, the career counseling division of ACA. In 1952, the specialties coalesced under one association, and what is now ACA was born in 1952. Another benchmark of a profession is the development of a Code of Ethics and the first Code of Ethics for the profession was in 1961. Another standard becomes the educational requirements for a profession, a profession needs to standardize its educational requirements and that started in 1971 and also occurred in 1981. In 1971, CORE, the Council on Rehabilitation Education was formed to accredit rehabilitation counseling programs and in 1981 CACREP, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling for Related Educational Programs was born to accredit educational programs and other counseling specialties other than rehabilitation counseling. Licensure is an important part of professionalization and the first state to be licensed as-in professional counseling was 1976 and was Virginia. The last state was in 2009, California so all 50 states and DC were licensed by 2009.

We established a certification body, The National Board for Certified Counselors in 1982. The profession established a National Honor Society, Chi Sigma Iota in 1985 through a project called 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling. In 2010 the profession agreed on one definition of counseling, what it is we do and the definition is “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals.” And in 2013, the profession endorsed one licensure title, a Licensed Professional Counselor and one specific scope of practice for licensure in the United States in an effort to advance the profession and to standardize licensure in the United States.

John: Wow, so over the course of 100 years, you’ve outlined quite a history that counseling has experienced as we developed as a profession. David, I’d like to explore a little bit more particularly about the issue of accreditation when we come back in a moment. I’ll take a short break. You’re listening to the American Counseling Association’s Podcast Series. We’ll be back in just a moment.
John: And welcome back to our special edition of the American Counseling Association’s Podcast Series. I’m John Duggan. Today I’m talking with Dr. David Kaplan, he’s Chief Professional Officer for the American Counseling Association and we’re talking about some of the new policies related to licensure and accreditation. David, we’ve really come closer to 2013 and some of the policies that are unfolding. Could you talk to us a little bit more about what’s going on today and how it’s impacting our profession?

David: Sure. That brings us to 2013. Something very important happened in 2013 which directly related to the policies that we’re talking about today. CACREP and CORE became corporate affiliates and have announced they will merge in 2017 and so by having one education body for the profession of counseling which will become CACREP, the point that I wanted to make is that- and I apologize for the thorough history lesson there- but the point I wanted to make was that this is part of a normal developmental process that all healthy professions go through because if they don’t, they stagnate and die.

John: Okay, so now we’re coming to the language of counseling, I’m thinking of developmental theory and that of human growth and development as well as organizational growth and I’d imagine that there are times where we’ll experience the kicks, such as the joyful moments of celebrating licensure in 50 states as well as Washington DC and different territories as well as some nadirs, those times of difficulty in growth and struggle.

David: Right and we have to be very sensitive to the fact that in ACA is very sensitive to the fact that anytime there is growth, there is discomfort and difficulty. We know from Systems Theory that systems don’t like to change and when there is a positive growth for a system, that that is still awkward and difficult and painful for people and we have to be very sensitive to that.

John: Okay. So, let’s get a little more concrete; how is this moving our profession forward?

David: In a number of different ways; you mentioned the celebration that occurred when all 50 states were licensed and I think you can probably hear that throughout the entire country. When we lobby for legislation that is in the best interest of our clients, and our students, and the counseling profession, I can tell you from personal experience that there was a significant difference, when we used to go up on the hill, and say, “Gee, we are licensed in 45 states, we are licensed in 48 states, we are licensed in all but two states”. And then we were able to say, “We are licensed in every state plus Washington DC, plus Puerto Rico”. They perked up their ears; the legislators really liked hearing that we were licensed in all 50 states, that said, “We had arrived” in many ways.

John: And that’s got to be a great feeling to know that we have arrived, and that we have licensure across this country. David, I want to take a moment to let our listeners know that we have a line where people can call us in with more questions, and I’ll
randomly select some to include in future podcasts. If any listener has a question that they would like to pose, please call us at 800-347-6647, and dial extension 600, again that’s 800-347-6647, that’s the toll free number to the American Counseling Association, dial extension 600, follow the instructions, and we’ll try to include your questions in future podcasts and conference calls on this and other topics. Talking with me today is Dr. David Kaplan, Chief Professional Officer for the American Counseling Association. I’m your host John Duggan; we’ll be back in just a moment.

And welcome back to our conversation on new accreditation standards for the future of education in the counseling profession. I’m your host, John Duggan. David, we’ve been talking a lot, about how these policies are intended to be helpful to provide a sense of standardization. Could you speak a little bit more to that? As you know, I’m one of the counselors on staff, and I frequently am responding to emails and calls from members who are just really worried about this.

David: Right. The way that I like to put it is, “These policies are advancing the profession because they standardize the profession”. One of the benchmarks of professionalization is that a profession becomes more standardized and a more known quantity; and that is in the best interest of the public that we serve. It’s important for our clients and prospective clients, and the public in general to know what it is they’re getting in a professional counselor.

John: Okay.

David: And if there are no training standards, you really don’t know what you are getting, that’s not to say that one program may not be as good as another, it’s not to say that they are not training good counselors. But, you simply don’t know what you’re getting because they’re not meeting a common set of standards. An example that I like to give is: if there were some different medical schools, and one medical school said, “We really like to train people to do injections but we’re not so good with prescribing medications. So, we’re not going to teach you how to prescribe medication”, and another program said, “We like medications, and we’re going to teach you how to prescribe medications, but we don’t think injections are great. So, we’re not going to teach you how to do injections”, and another program says, “You know what? We’re really not going to teach you how to do an overall exam”. Well, if you went to a physician and said, “Well, I need an exam”, and they said, “I don’t really do that”, or if you went to a physician and said, “I need a prescription”, and they said, “Well, my program didn’t train me to do prescriptions; we focused more on injections. So I’ll be glad to give you an injection but if you need a prescription you’ll have to go see another physician.” That is not in the best interest of the public. The public needs to know and has the right to know what it is getting in a licensed professional.

John: Okay, so this makes sense. How we describe our work and our training to the public, but what do we say to those counselors – what do I say to those counselors who call and they have a sense of dread or panic?

David: Right and the way that I like to put is, there’s no reason to panic.
John: Okay, but there are a lot of people calling and a lot of people writing who are saying, “I’m afraid that I’m going to lose my license or that I won’t be employable.”

David: Nobody’s going to take your license away from you. Once you’re licensed and remain in good standing, no one’s going to take your license away from you. Jobs – there are plenty of jobs available now for all counselors regardless of educational accreditation that will continue to occur for the foreseeable future and down the road.

John: Right, so how do we know this about these jobs? Where are we getting that data?

David: Because the Department of Labor has designated counseling as a growth occupation so there are plenty of jobs out there. Nobody – people are going to be able to get jobs. No one is going to take your license away from you and this is a long term developmental phase of counseling. This is not something that is going to happen in a year or two or three.

John: So you’re looking for a much longer term process.

David: Right, this is a five, 10, maybe even decade’s long project where over time and down the road programs will become and requirements will become standardized around a CACREP degree.

John: Got it, so that brings us back to the first part of our podcast where you were talking about how this new accreditation policy speaks to future counseling students to the new matriculants in graduate program training.

David: Right. And that’s why the governing council very specifically stated that we will advocate for a CACREP degree for licensure starting in the year 2020. The governing council wanted to make sure that counselors who were trained under times – other times when standards were not the same as they are today or students who are in the program and new professionals who are just graduating who did not know about these policies and could not take them into account that we advocate for them. And that’s an important part of these policies. That we are advocating for all licensed counselors who are currently licensed.

John: And what about those who are currently licensed or practicing and don’t have a CACREP degree?

David: We are going to spend just as much time advocating for those licensed before 2020 from regionally accredited programs to have all the rights, privileges and options as someone with a CACREP degree.

John: So how will ACA do that?
David: Okay, we are promoting generous grand-parenting periods so people aren’t left behind and so as a specific example for that ACA was able to get a provision included in the National Defense Authorization Act that extended the period that licensed professional counselors with regionally accredited degrees could get into TRICARE for independent practice by seven years. So we were able to get that grand-parenting period extended by seven years and we actively advocated for that.

John: So what would ACA do to help a member – a counselor who is in a state that in the future, based on their own decision, they decide that they want to require a CACREP degree? What will ACA do for those folks?

David: If there is a licensing board and it's the issue of portability of licensure. If a counselor down the road – 10, 15 years from now -- who is currently licensed wants to move to a state – let’s say they want to retire to Florida or some sunshine state, have a part time private practice so they want to be licensed and the state they want to move to in the meantime over the decades has established a CACREP requirement for licensure, we will actively advocate with that licensing board. We will contact the board. We will send a letter – do whatever we can to advocate for the fact that this counselor should be allowed to transfer their license to the new state and have all the rights, privileges and options of anyone who graduated from a CACREP degree to be able– who could transfer their license.

John: I’m hearing the theme of licensure coming up again and again.

David: Right and at the same time it’s important to understand these policies specifically focus on licensure. That we endorse graduation from a CACREP program as the pathway to licensure for independent practice. The focus of these policies is on licensure.

John: Okay. So David we’ve looked at the history. Help me understand again, what’s the timeline for implementation?

David: Well, this is part of the request for people not to panic. This is a long-term project-- keep in mind that what we're talking about are ACA policies, they are not legislation and so they're going to happen over time and it'll probably be a natural evolution over 5-10-15-20 years where there's more and more movement for those coming into the profession to be trained in a CACREP accredited program.

John: Okay and David I want to take a moment to remind our listeners that if anyone has a question that they would like to ask of us, for inclusion in a future podcast or conference call, you can call 1-800-347-6647 and dial extension 600. That's 800-347-6647 extension 600, leave a voicemail message with a question, you'll have all of the instructions on how to do this and I will do my best to randomly select some of those questions and weave them into future podcasts to continue the conversation and help clarify things. David for you, I have a few more questions about Medicare, school
counselors and a few other issues but we'll get to that in just a moment. We'll be back in a minute.

Thanks for listening and welcome back. I'm John Duggan, manager of Professional Development for the American Counseling Association. I'm talking today with, David Kaplan, Chief Professional Officer and we're exploring more about the issues related to accreditation, licensure and moving our profession forward. David, during the break I started to wonder, has there ever been anything like this in our profession before? You've given a good history, but I'm just trying to make sense of it. Has this ever happened before?

David: We sort of have a history-- we have something to look back on this and this was when licensure first started. There were plenty of people who had degrees that would not count for licensure. And the same thing happened; licensure took a long time, from 1976 until 2009, so that happened over a long period of time. People who had degrees had already been out in the field, that had degrees that would not count for the new licensure laws were grand-parented in, they were still able to practice, they were still able to earn a living, they were still able to get reimbursement from insurance companies. So I see this very much as an analogy to what happened when we started to implement licensure.

John: Okay. So this decision is new but this is not necessarily unfamiliar territory for our profession. How about Medicare? Will these new accreditation standards have any impact on our ability to get Medicare moved?

David: Well see this is an example of where these policies specifically relate to licensure. These policies don't say anything about Medicare and from my understanding from our Government Affairs people, it's unlikely that when we get Medicare, that they will require a CACREP degree, for the simple reason--and it's the same reason one of the questions that we've gotten is, “Well even though I'm licensed, will the insurance companies I'm signed up with require a CACREP degree so they'll kick me off the panel?” And my best understanding is that the answer to both of those are no, for the same reason. Because the federal government and insurance companies don't want to go through the bureaucracy of having to check and confirm whether somebody had a specific type of degree. It's easy enough for them to check whether you have a license or not. But checking on a degree is a level of bureaucracy that I don't think the federal government is going to want for Medicare; that's my best understanding.

John: So, this could potentially help us get Medicare in the future.

David: Yes, to get Medicare, absolutely, because one of the things that we see, and I've experienced this one, I've lobbied up on Capitol Hill is that legislators expect one voice from a profession. And when there are multiple voices, when there are different bodies that say, “No, I represent the education”, “We represent the educational components of the profession”, “No, we do”, “No, we do, don’t listen to them, listen to us”. That signals to the legislature that the profession doesn’t really have its act together, and may be in disarray, and they are likely to, essentially, say to us, and I've had this happen at meetings that I've gone to up on the Hill, where they say, “Look, you've got multiple groups, claiming to be- to represent the profession, why don’t you all go away and come
back when you get your act together?” So, by having one educational body for the profession, by having one set of training standards, that allows us to go to the Hill and say, “We have one educational body, we have one set of training standards for the profession, moving forward”. And that does, in my opinion, increases the likelihood that we would get Medicare legislation passed.

John: And looking toward a unified voice; where do we stand on licensure for school counselors?

David: ACA does support licensure for school counselors as long as they demonstrate clinical course work requirement. So, one of the questions we’ve been getting is, “Well, what does that mean for school counselors?” So, what it means is that school counselors should take course work that focuses on psychotherapy, diagnosis, evaluation, administration of assessments, tests and appraisal, referral, and the establishment of counseling plans for the treatment of individuals, couples, groups, and families with emotional, mental addiction, and physical disorders. But with that background, absolutely, we do support school counselors being licensed.

John: David, I’m mindful that we’re coming to the close of our program for today. Is there anything that I haven’t asked you that you’d like to add?

David: Well, I think you’ve done a very good job of asking the right questions, and I think we’ve covered everything. Again, the only thing I would say is what I said at the beginning; for anyone who would like to look at the policies themselves, and a set of FAQs, the initial FAQs that we have set up in response to the policies, they are available on the ACA website at www.counseling.org under the spotlight section.

John: Good reminder and I’ll be sure to put that in the show notes. Thanks so much for your time today. I very much appreciate our conversation.

David: It’s my pleasure, thank you.

John: David Kaplan, Chief Professional Officer for the American Counseling Association. As a final reminder, if you have any questions that you would like to work into future podcasts or conference calls, please call them in and record them. You can call 800-347-6647, select extension 600. Now, please remember we won’t be calling you back but if you leave a question for us, I’ll do my best to work it into future programming. That’s all we have for today, thanks so much for joining me. I’m John Duggan, Manager for Professional Development, saying, so long, and make it a good day.

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