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# VACC NEWS

## The Virginia Association of Clinical Counselors

*Serving the needs of Virginia's clinical counselors since 1980!*



### *Letter from the Past-President, Joan Normandy-Dolberg*

As summer winds down and autumn approaches we have so much to look forward to...the days become cooler, the children go back to school and our practices return to normal after the disruption of summer vacations! For some of us, another academic year is about to begin and summer vacation is a dim memory, but no matter what the season, as Licensed Professional Counselors our commitment to our profession is apparent in our thoughts, words and actions.

While you were enjoying the beautiful weather, VACC has continued to work for the benefit of all counselors in our state. Your Board members have been attending the Virginia Board of Counselors meetings in Richmond. As the state chapter of the American Mental Health Counselors Association, three Board members attended national leadership training, and, in keeping with our primary mission of advocacy for the clinical counseling profession in Virginia, several Board members met with our Senators and their staff on Capitol Hill.

We hope you will visit our website at [www.VACC.org](http://www.VACC.org) to see the latest news and learn more about What's Happening in the field of counseling both in our state and throughout the country!

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Check our website for more information and a schedule of upcoming workshops on **SUPERVISION (20 CEUs)**, **How to Build a Powerhouse Practice**, **Ethics** and our Annual **Winter Symposium!**  
**[www.VACC.org](http://www.VACC.org)!**

## SUPERVISION WORKSHOPS A BIG SUCCESS!

In response to the new 20 hour training requirement recently mandated by the state for individuals providing clinical supervisions, VACC offered 9 workshops throughout the state. Hildy Getz, Professor Emeritus at Virginia Tech taught a 3-part series for a total of 20 CEUs at Sweet Briar, in 2008 and 2009. Due to health issues Hildy was replaced by Penny A. Norford, PhD, LPC, CSAC, who completed teaching the workshops in both Richmond and Chantilly VA.

Each workshop used didactic and visual presentations, small group interaction and work sessions to teach the skills necessary to be an effective supervisor. The first workshop focused on Competency and contained a 2-hour section on Ethics (thus fulfilling our Ethics requirement also), the second workshop focused on the Skills of Providing Clinical Supervision, and the third workshop focused on The Relationship as the Core of Clinical Supervision.

Participants commented very favorably about the quality of the presentations, practicality of the material presented, and the skills of the presenters. In addition they liked the convenience of the locations and the breakfast, lunch and snacks that were provided.

Our schedule for next year has not yet been finalized; as soon as it is, we will provide more information via email and on our website at [www.VACC.org](http://www.VACC.org).



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## ADVOCACY COMMITTEE NEWS

By Michael E. Nahl – Chair, Advocacy Committee

The VACC Professional Advocacy Committee has identified and targeted several organizations that have policies that discriminate against Licensed Professional Counselors. We have written letters and alerted our national organizations about these issues.

The Advocacy Committee has written to GEHA (Government Employees Health Alliance) because it does not reimburse LPCs, and have joined with AMHCA to begin a national letter writing campaign. You can assist. Visit [www.amhca.org](http://www.amhca.org) for more information or copy the letter on our website.

VACC has also written a letter to the Virginia Board of Education challenging their stipulation that only a psychologist or physician can sign a request for Homebound Instruction. A copy of this letter is available under the Advocacy section of our website (use the Committees link). We have coordinated with LCSWs and MFTs to make school districts aware of the inequities of this policy.

VACC has also addressed challenges to the right of LPCs to do psychological testing. Michael Nahl was challenged by Value Options and United Behavioral Health as to whether LPCs are appropriately trained to perform psychological testing; he provided sufficient credentials and documentation and both managed care companies dropped their challenges.

The VACC Professional Advocacy Committee's mission is to intercede in situations in which LPCs are discriminated against in hiring or reimbursement. We do not get involved in personal issues particular to an individual, such as not having sent in a claim in time, or the like. But if a business advertises to hire only LCSWs or psychologists, let us know. Or if a plan won't reimburse you because you are an LPC, let us know. (This rarely happens these days except for some out of state self-managed plans.) Send your concerns to [michaelnahl@cox.net](mailto:michaelnahl@cox.net) or Michael E. Nahl, LPC; P.O. Box 7066; Virginia Beach, VA 23457.

## AMHCA Provides Leadership Training & Lobbying on Capitol Hill



***VACC Past President Joan Normandy-Dolberg and President-Elect Theresa Johnson Sion meet Senator Christopher Dodd of CT.***

AMHCA's annual leadership training which was held on July 23rd and 24th in Washington DC was attended by 60 leaders from 31 state chapters; Ed Navis (Richmond), Theresa Johnson-Sion (Virginia beach) and Joan Normandy-Dolberg (Fairfax) represented VACC.

On July 23, 2009, 70 licensed mental health counselors representing 30 states visited 40 Senators' Capitol Hill offices. AMHCA state chapter leaders met with health legislative assistants in their senator's Washington, DC offices to push for passage of Senate Bill 671, which includes reimbursement by Medicare for LMHCs and LPCs. At the present time Medicare only reimburses LCSWs and psychologists as providers of mental health services. AMHCA state leaders discussed how their outpatient mental health services promote preventative mental and physical health as well as economic efficiency.

Following meeting with AMHCA's representatives, Senator Johnson of South Dakota signed onto S. 671 as a cosponsor. Many members' offices expressed an interest in supporting S. 671 and including Medicare reimbursement of LMHCs/LPCs in the Senate's health care reform legislation.

AMHCA recognized three legislators for their commitment to mental health counselors and mental health awareness during its annual awards luncheon. Senator Blanche Lincoln, the Senate sponsor for S.671, received the President's Award. Former AMHCA



***Above, a coalition of LPCs from several states met with Senator Webb's Counsel, Douglas Ierley (center), to discuss Senate Bill 671.***



President Victoria Sardi presented Gretchen Alkema, Senator Lincoln's chief health staffer, with the President's Award. Congressman Bart Gordon and Congressman Bob Filner appeared at the luncheon and were recognized by AMHCA Policy Committee Chair, Dan Holdinghaus, as "Legislator of the Year" for their use of Medicare legislation and Veterans' Affairs legislation to promote the LMHC/LPC profession.

***Left, AMHCA state leaders tour the U.S. Capitol, guided by Ronald A. Sarasin, former US Representative from***



## **Medicare Mental Health Counseling Coverage Bills Introduced!**

### **Congressional Background Information**

Legislation has been introduced in both the House and Senate to establish Medicare coverage of licensed professional counselors. On March 23rd, Senators Blanche Lincoln (D-AR) and John Barrasso (R-WY) introduced S. 671, the "Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2009." The next day, Representative Bart Gordon (D-TN) introduced H.R. 1693, identical legislation with the same title. The legislation would also establish coverage of licensed marriage and family therapists. AMHCA and ACA worked closely with Senators Lincoln and Barrasso, and with Congressman Gordon, on the development and preparation of the legislation.

### ***We Need Cosponsors!***

**Mental health counselors are strongly encouraged to call, write, or e-mail their Senators to ask them to cosponsor S. 671, and their Representative to ask for co-sponsorship of H.R. 1693.** The more cosponsors we have for S. 671 and H.R. 1693, the more likely we are to gain their inclusion in the larger Medicare legislation to be approved by Congress. Follow this effective method to reach your senators and representatives:



**Call 202-224-3121 (the main Capitol switchboard).  
Ask to be connected to the office of a specific senator or representative.  
Once connected, ask to speak with the health legislative assistant.**

**Ask his or her boss to co-sponsor the bills referenced in this message.**

### ***We Are at a Critical Crossroads!***

Yes, Congress has actively considered legislation providing Medicare reimbursement to LPCs for several years now. But **THIS year**, in **THIS session**, Congress will be considering legislation to reform America's health care system. Plus, Congress will pass Medicare legislation this year, in order to prevent a scheduled 20% pay cut for physicians under the program from taking effect on January 1, 2010. We need mental health counselor coverage to be part of this Medicare package—and this represents a prime opportunity to achieve our long sought goals.

**Please take a moment to call or e-mail your Representative and Senators and ask them to cosponsor the "Seniors Mental Health Access Improvement Act of 2009" (H.R. 1693 / S. 671).**

This legislation will improve Medicare beneficiaries' access to outpatient mental health care in a cost-effective manner, by establishing coverage of highly-qualified LPCs.



## **Veteran's Administration to Request New Occupational Category for Counselors**

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AMHCA and ACA are pleased to announce that the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) has approved the establishment of a new occupational category, or categories, for licensed professional counselors and marriage and family therapists working within the VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) health care system. The move is a step toward implementation of Public Law 109-461, the "Veterans Benefits, Healthcare, and Information Technology Act of 2006," which established explicit recognition of both mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists within the VHA. Until the VHA's endorsement of a new occupational category, it was unclear if counselors and marriage and family therapists would be considered merely subcategories of an existing occupational category for a different profession.

Establishment of an occupational category for professional counselors has been a key objective for AMHCA and ACA in implementation of the law. Federal occupational categories are developed by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), but only at the request of federal agencies such as the VA. Creation of an occupational category will mark a key step in achieving recognition of the profession, although the process is likely to take another year or more.

The VHA's announcement of the new occupational category came after the House Veterans' Affairs Committee—which has

direct jurisdiction over the agency—wrote to Secretary Eric Shinseki urging the VA to "move quickly" to establish regulations enabling counselors and marriage and family therapists to "work to their full potential within the VA." The letter also stated that federal job classifications for each of the professions should be established, "in order to recognize their status as full-fledged, independent mental health professions."

The House Veterans Affairs Committee letter was developed and promoted jointly by AMHCA, ACA, and the American Association for Marriage and Family (AAMFT). Our three organizations—recently joined by the California Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CAMFT)—have been working closely together to push for implementation of P.L. 109-461. Our organizations' close collaborative working relationship with AAMFT and CAMFT will increase our effectiveness in pushing for new occupational categories for each profession, and for continued progress by the VA and Congress in expanding the role of counselors and marriage and family therapists in serving our nation's veterans.



## VACC BOARD ANNUAL RETREAT HELD IN SANDBRIDGE

The VACC Board held their annual retreat on May 4 through May 7 in Sandbridge VA. Twelve board members met for a communal dinner at 6:00 P.M Friday, followed by two days of warmth, friendship and serious planning for next year. Among the items discussed were:



- ✚ Updating and improving our website, including on-line registration for workshops.
- ✚ Election of officers and committee heads for next year
- ✚ Workshops and conferences for 2009-2010
- ✚ Amending the by-laws to allow voting by email and other electronic means
- ✚ The need to continue to advocate for our profession in order to safeguard and expand our ability to practice.
- ✚ We will continue to fight discrimination provide education and training, disseminate information, monitor legislation, and coordinate with other professional groups and agencies.
- ✚ VACC can continue to improve on communications. We can improve in our marketing to new members and welcoming them.
- ✚ The need to meet the needs of other areas of our state through the formation of additional regional groups in areas such as Charlottesville, Lynchburg and Roanoke
- ✚ Ed Navis motioned that VACC provide a \$1000 fellowship each year in the name of Linda and Mike Jeffrey. Mike Nahl seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The Board approved an ad hoc committee to manage the fellowship, including Katie Moore, Ed Navis, and Mike Jeffrey

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**WE NEED YOU!!!** Please consider joining the Board or helping to form a group in your region. If you are interested, please email Joan at [jdolberg@cox.net](mailto:jdolberg@cox.net). Thanks!

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## **MEMBERSHIP REPORT**

**Anna Epperson, Chair**

As of August 17 VACC has 204 members, an increase from the 199 in 2007 and the 180 in 2008. These members include 176 clinicians, 1 retired LPC, and 27 students.

We hope to continue to increase student membership through visiting local universities and providing needed services to counseling students.

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## **WEBSITE UPDATES**

By Michael Nahl, Communications Committee Chair

Have you looked at our website ([www.vacc.org](http://www.vacc.org)) lately? We provide important information about our field, including requirements for licensure and a list of qualified supervisors. In addition we have links to the Virginia Board of Counseling and the Department of Health Professions, to nearby state clinical counseling associations, to AMHCA, to Virginia graduate counseling programs, insurance companies, and to all the state and federal legislators. Our website is an easy way to access sites important in our field.



For the students, we have a separate page that includes links to the state counseling programs, Board mentors, and a list of clinical supervisors. By the way, any VACC member who provides supervision can list their name on our site at no charge. You can also advertise your practice and your services for free on the Member's Spotlight page, which is easy to complete.

Updates on federal and state legislation affecting LPCs can be found on the home page and the You Can Help sections of the website. The You Can Help section also features the Hall of Shame, wherein we list examples of discriminatory hiring and reimbursement practices toward members of our profession. This section also contains links to federal and state legislators.

Looking for a job? Want to advertise a job position you have available? Need or want to rent office space? We can help. Look for the Job Opportunities section.

Want to renew your membership or become a member? You can do that online. You can also register for our conferences and pay for them using the website.

The history of our profession and VACC can also be found on the website, as can recent newsletters and our bylaws.

**[Look us up at www.VACC.org!!!](http://www.VACC.org)**



# Don't Miss Out!!!



Check our website for a schedule of upcoming workshops which will be held this fall in Northern Virginia, Richmond, and Charlottesville. These include Supervision, Powerhouse Practice and our free (to members) Winter Conference.

Please plan to join us!

**Contact VACC if you change your email address so we can keep in touch!**