

Life Care Planning: Rehabilitation Education Curricula and Faculty Needs

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Abstract. *A survey of programs providing vocational rehabilitation counselor education demonstrated little available curriculum regarding life care planning and expert testimony. This article reports on the results of a survey study and suggests that curriculum specific to life care planning and case management be added to university rehabilitation counselor training programs.*

Introduction

Recently, Fong, Leahy, Saunders, Tarvydas, Ferrin, & Lee (2003), examined the training needs of practicing rehabilitation counselors. They queried counselors working the public state-federal vocational rehabilitation program, counselors in non-profit private programs, and counselors working in private for profit settings. All those sampled were Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC). They found that 22% worked for proprietary rehabilitation companies, 11% worked in private practice, 5% worked for insurance companies, and 4% worked for medical centers or general hospitals. The results suggest that 42% of those currently certified as CRCs by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification work in an area involving case management practices and, to some degree, forensic interests, including life care planning. Fong and Leahy (2003) found that those CRCs working in proprietary settings saw training in the area of case management to be of critical importance but that only 59% felt that they were prepared to the degree necessary to offer case management practice. Likewise, 83% of this same group found understanding and ability to perform expert testimony to be of critical importance but that only 67% percent believed they were prepared to offer such.

The Life Care Plan (LCP) is a case management tool, ideal for allowing those responsible for the care of persons with a severe disability to guide and coordinate service delivery for those who have sustained a catastrophic injury (Isom & Marini, 2002). The culmination or climax of the life care planning process in the legal or forensic arena has been characterized as presenting and defending the plan in court before a jury (Isom & Marini, 2002). This study looks to determine how well those universities, traditionally called upon to prepare rehabilitation students for professional practice, are preparing their students in the areas of case management, life care planning, and forensics.

The Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) is a certifying body that sets specific

standards for approved rehabilitation counseling training programs. CORE has set specific curriculum standards to insure that CORE accredited programs meet an educational minimum standard that reflects the current practice needs of rehabilitation counselors working in all venues in the field. The program, once accredited, undergoes regular review to insure that the program continues to meet those standards insuring that the graduates are provided the necessary training and education to perform professional rehabilitation duties.

Method

Participants

The data used in this study were obtained by survey. The individuals surveyed were characterized as Program Coordinators of university rehabilitation counselor training programs. Eighty-five of the 91 CORE accredited programs were surveyed as listed in the 2002 CORE newsletter. Of those 85 programs, 64 responded giving this survey a 75% response rate.

Instruments

The survey was presented electronically via email during the spring term of 2003. The survey consisted of 6 items.

- Item number one queried whether the university's CORE accredited program offered a certificate program in Life Care Planning.
- Item number two queried whether the program offered a dedicated course in Life Care Planning.
- Item three queried whether the program offered none, one, two, or three or more lectures or presentations on Life Care Planning.
- Item four queried the Program Coordinators on their perceived need to offer a specific course on Life Care Planning.
- Item five asked if the faculty had the expertise to cover Life Care Planning.
- Item six asked for additional comments regarding the topic.

Results

Only 4 schools (6%) reported having a course solely devoted to Life Care Planning and one program (University of Florida) offered a certificate on the topic. Results for question three indicated that 21 programs (33%) reported offering no course content on Life Care Planning, 19 (30%) offered one lecture, 12 (18%) offered two lectures and 11 (17%) offered three or more lectures.

Of those responding to question four, the four schools that currently offer a course indicated a course was indeed needed. Eight coordinators rated the topic is deserving of at least one lecture, seven (11%) indicated two lectures, 18 (28%) indicated three or more lectures were needed in life care planning, 12 (19%) found the question non-applicable, and the remainder responded based on the number of lectures they currently offer. Of the 64 programs responding, 33 (52%) of coordinators answered "yes" to question five which asked about the faculty's expertise to cover the topic, 29 (45%) responded "no," and the remainder did not respond.

Finally, on question six, only 18 coordinators responded and there was no clear consensus

of opinions on the topic. Three coordinators expressed Life Care Planning to be a growing area, especially in relation to the aging population (despite the fact that life care plans traditionally have not been used exclusively in this area). Three other program coordinators reported they are working on developing specific courses related to the topic, and one coordinator responded that they are in the process of developing an online certificate program.

Discussion

Regarding the general importance of life care planning and related expert testimony among practicing CRCs, it appears that at least two-thirds of CORE programs address the topic while 33% do not. A reported 52% programs did have faculty with the expertise to teach Life Care Planning and/or expert testimony and 45% did not. Certainly, more needs to be written in traditional rehabilitation education publications about these topics to reach existing faculty and to bring those faculty with little or no clinical experience the information that is relevant and up-to-date regarding common and emerging case practices.

This issue would also address the needs of rehabilitation counselor training programs in identifying, recruiting and training experienced journeyman or senior level rehabilitation counselors into their doctoral programs. This process would insure that a continued supply of clinically experienced faculty is available to provide clinically relevant and practical rehabilitation case management practices to their graduates.

Future research may examine other professional training programs that supply Life Care Planners. The need to insure that training institutions are in fact covering in their curricula the role and function of the graduates from their programs is equally important for those disciplines as it is for rehabilitation counseling. For example, nursing programs, medical schools, social work programs, occupational therapist programs, physical therapist programs, and psychology programs (Weed, 1997) would all be appropriate to survey.

References

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