

## Chapter 3

# Public Accountability for Occupational Performance

In recent years, public accountability related to occupational performance has increased dramatically. With over 800 occupations now being regulated by state, local or federal legislation, testing for licensure and certification is highly scrutinized. This chapter addresses licensure, certification, and testing issues pertaining to these areas.

### Licensure and Certification

Although the terms **licensure** and **certification** are often used interchangeably, they are differentiated by their purposes.

Traditionally, licensing has been required by law in order to enter certain professions. It is the most restrictive form of occupational regulation; activities covered by the occupational scope of practice may not legally be performed without prior authorization, which can only be granted by the appropriate government agency.

Certification has typically been a voluntary program that recognizes individuals who have achieved beyond the basic level of competency necessary to practice in a profession. Lack of certification does not usually exclude a person from practice, as is the case with licensing (Johnson and Corgel 1983).

### Licensing Requirements

The power to license occupations is granted under the United States Constitution and the constitutions of various states. The purpose of licensing, according to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (1985), is to protect the public. This text, comprised of testing guidelines prepared by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education, states:

“Licensing requirements are imposed to ensure that those licensed possess knowledge and skills in sufficient degree to perform important occupational activities safely and effectively.”

The legal requirements that an applicant must meet in order to be granted a license are usually established at the state level. As a general rule, only those applicants who satisfy the

state prerequisites are allowed to take the state licensing examination. Criteria set by state regulatory agencies include training and experience, minimum age, years of formal education or academic degrees, a period of residency within the state and evidence of good moral character (Shimberg 1982).

In fulfilling the purpose of protecting the public, licensure laws are enacted by states which “assure the qualifications of new practitioners and discourage incompetent and unscrupulous practice of the occupation” (Fortune 1985). This is accomplished through several processes including extensive testing for licensure and the state licensing authorities' disciplining practitioners who fail to meet recognized standards.

## National Testing Organizations

To facilitate meeting the states' responsibilities regarding licensure and discipline, organizations such as the National Board of Chiropractic Examiners have been developed. Such occupational testing organizations provide expertise in the areas of testing and measurement, and allow the agencies which govern licensing to address other important issues. Within the United States, the arrangement is such that the states remain the final authority for granting a license while utilizing scores from examinations produced by national organizations.

## The Inspector General Report

A 1989 report on “State Licensure and Discipline of Chiropractors” prepared by the Office of Inspector General, United States Department of Health and Human Services, recommends that state chiropractic licensing authorities be provided with sufficient funds and enforcement authority to carry out their responsibilities as well as a full range of disciplinary options.

The Inspector General's report also endorses the use of high quality national licensure examinations, and stresses the desirability of uniform definitions of scope of practice and licensure requirements within the United States.

## Standards of Testing

With the increased usage of tests in all aspects of society, particularly in reference to licensure and certification, guidelines for test construction have been prepared by the federal government and the private sector. Standards set by the government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Departments of Labor and Justice, are referred to as the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* (1978). Standards prepared by the private sector

are the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1985)*, referred to previously in this chapter.

Guidelines pertaining to all forms of testing address the importance of test reliability and test validity. Both elements are necessary to ensure that the results of a test are consistent and accurate measures of what is purportedly being assessed.

## Definition of Terms

**Reliability** and **validity** as applied to examinations and survey results are defined below.

### Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which test scores, survey results, or the data obtained from other measurements are accurate. It “concerns the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials” (Carmines and Zeller 1987).

The score a person obtains on an examination or the response a person gives to survey stimuli may or may not be an accurate representation of that individual's typical behavior or response. To determine how accurate results are, it is important to administer the test, survey, or other measurement device on more than one occasion. “The more consistent the results given by repeated measurements, the higher the reliability of the measuring procedure” (Carmines and Zeller 1987).

In an attempt to assess the reliability of the National Board's job analysis survey instrument, the survey was sent to a selected group of respondents a second time. Results of both administrations were compared and data from these comparisons are presented in Chapter 4 of this report.

### Validity

Validity as it pertains to examinations, survey instruments, or other measurement tools, refers to the appropriateness, meaningfulness, and usefulness of inferences about results (APA 1985).

Two separate and distinct validity issues are the concern of this report. The first issue pertains to the validity of the survey data; the second concerns use of survey data to establish the **content validity** of a national practical exam. Each of these validity issues will be discussed.

Evidence that survey data are an accurate reflection of chiropractors, chiropractic patients, and the practice of chiropractic in the United States is based on the procedures followed in the development of the survey form detailed in Chapter 4. Additional evidence of the validity of survey data is the similarity between various survey findings and other published reports addressing the same information. Finally, Gael (1987) states that demonstrated reliability of

job analysis findings is accepted as evidence of survey validity.

Licensure and certification exams rely on a job analysis to provide evidence that an exam contains appropriate content. Content-related validity in a licensure exam is evidence that the tasks addressed in the exam appropriately reflect the tasks required for successful job performance. Content validity evidence relies upon a job analysis, as indicated in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*:

“Job analyses provide the primary basis for defining the content domain. If a single examination is used in the licensure or certification of people employed in a variety of settings and specializations, a number of jobs may need to be analyzed. Although the job analysis techniques are comparable to those used in employment testing, the emphasis for licensure and certification is limited appropriately to knowledge and skills necessary to protect the public...”

The *Standards for Educational And Psychological Testing* and the *Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures* are in agreement that, in order for licensure examinations to be valid, they must be based on a job analysis. The *Uniform Guidelines* state:

“Any validity study should be based upon a review of information about the job for which the selection procedure is to be used ... Any method of job analysis may be used if it provides the information required for the specific validation strategy used.”

Thus, the job analysis of chiropractic practice satisfies testing guidelines as defined above.