

DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF TYPES OF CREDENTIALS

From the ICE Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts, 2005.

Credentialing is the umbrella term that includes the concepts of accreditation, licensure, registration, and professional certification.

Credentialing can establish criteria for fairness, quality, competence, and/or safety for professional services provided by authorized individuals, for products, or for educational endeavors. Credentialing is the process by which an entity, authorized and qualified to do so, grants formal recognition to, or records the recognition status of individuals, organizations, institutions, programs, processes, services or products that meet predetermined and standardized criteria.

The **credentialing process** is essentially a method for maintaining *quality* standards of knowledge and performance, and in some cases, for stimulating *continued self-improvement*. Credentialing confers occupational *identity*.

Accreditation is the voluntary process by which a nongovernmental agency grants a time-limited recognition to an institution, organization, business, or other entity after verifying that it has met predetermined and standardized criteria.

Professional certification is a voluntary process by which a non-governmental entity assesses individuals against pre-determined standards for knowledge/skills/competencies, and grants a time-limited credential. The primary purpose of certification is assessment, and the assessment process is independent of a specific course of study provided by any one educational/course/curriculum provider. The holder of a professional certification is called a **certificant**.

Licensure is the mandatory process by which a state governmental agency grants time-limited permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation after verifying that he/she has met predetermined and standardized criteria, and offers title protection for those who meet the criteria.

Registration has at least three meanings: one is the mandatory process by which a state governmental agency grants a time-limited status on a registry, determined by specified knowledge-based requirements (e.g., experience, education, examinations), thereby authorizing those individuals to practice, similar to licensure. Its purpose is to maintain a continuous record of past and current occupational status of that individual, and to provide title protection.

A second meaning of **registration** is simply a listing of practitioners maintained by a state governmental entity, without educational, experiential, or competency-based requirements; for example, maintaining a list of practitioners on a state 'registry.'

A third use of the term **registration** is a professional designation defined by a state governmental entity in professional regulations or rules. However, the governmental regulatory body does not itself maintain a listing or registry of those who purport to meet registration requirements. Verification and authentication of such individuals are left to the employer of the individual claiming to be registered.

Therefore, when conducted according to legally defensible and psychometrically sound methods and standards, credentialing, in the form of accreditation, licensure, the first form of registration, or a professional certification, assures that a highly qualified, objective, recognized third party (the credentialing body) has examined this person, program, product or service and found it to meet defined, published, psychometrically sound, and legally defensible standards.

While the following may be considered by some to be types of credentialing processes, these certificate programs are not held to the objective standards required of the other types of credentialing programs.

A **knowledge-based Certificate of Competency** recognizes a relatively narrow scope of specialized knowledge used in performing duties or tasks required by a certain profession or occupation. There is no specific education or experience required prior to challenging this assessment. A certificate is issued after the individual passes an assessment instrument. This is **not** a professional certification.

An assessment-based certificate program is a non-degree-granting program that a) provides instruction and training to aid participants in acquiring specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies associated with intended learning outcomes; b) evaluates participants' achievement of the intended learning outcomes; and c) awards a certificate only to those participants who meet the performance, proficiency, or passing standard for the assessment(s). One who completes a professional certificate program is known as a **certificate holder**. A credential is usually NOT granted at the completion of a certificate program.

A **certificate of attendance or participation** is issued after an individual attends or participates in a particular meeting or course. Usually, there is no knowledge assessed prior to issuing this type of certificate. A certificate of attendance or participation is **not a credential**, because the recipients are not required to demonstrate competence according to professional or trade standards.

(These aforementioned certificate programs should not be confused with high level, post-master's degree programs, such as those offered within some nursing specialties.)

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