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## The Next Step in the Public Recognition/Acceptance of Professional Counselors

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# The Next Step in the Public Recognition/Acceptance of Professional Counselors

Don W. Locke

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Thanks for the opportunity to share with you a concept that I think will be one of the next steps in the development of our counseling profession. Over the past thirty years professional counselors have come to be recognized by the public and other helping professions as significant contributors within the mental health community. National training standards have been developed and counselor training programs have and are seeking to meet those standards. Mississippi now has training programs in institutions throughout the state that meet the rigorous requirements for accreditation by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Mississippi, along with all fifty states, has license opportunities for professional counselors and LPCs are being employed in a wide variety of settings. All counselors can also seek national certification through the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). Credentials for Mississippi school counselors are supported by legislation and routes exist other than teaching to enter the field.

Public perception and acceptance of professional counselor has increased significantly with each additional level of credibility that professional counselors have obtained. As professional counselors have developed their skills through supervised clinical practice their ability to serve clients has also increased. Mississippi could well be served even more efficiently in the future by individuals who have acquired additional advanced clinical skills. These skills could be achieved through the completion of a clinical doctorate. Several professions (e.g. Nursing, Psychology, Pharmacy) have developed clinical or professional doctorates and several are offered at institutions in Mississippi. These doctoral or “terminal” degrees are not designed according to the traditional research based, dissertation upon completion of coursework format. This type of doctorate is not designed for individuals planning a teaching career within the profession. The degree is designed to meet the needs of the practitioner who is serving clients in a variety of settings as a professional counselor.

Professional counselors with the LPC designation many times are perceived by the public as “mid level” helping professionals since they do not hold a doctorate. The professional or clinical doctorate could be the next step in our profession to eliminate this concept. Hopefully you will be seeing this type of doctorate offered in the near future in Mississippi and throughout the country. I believe that it is an idea that has a place in our profession and one that will provide a stronger and more experienced counselor for the public’s that we serve.