Acronyms in the Helping Professions: A Guide to the Perplex

I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
   A. Introduction
   - Confused by the strings of letters that appear in listings of helping professionals or in their jargon?
   - A quick look at the yellow pages will seem like a trip to alphabet city
   - We will review the letters’ meaning today!
     - Professionals list acronyms for their professional license, national certification, and/or degree after their names.
     - Some acronyms refer to for tests, therapies, or diagnoses.

I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
   B. Professional Licensing / Certification
   - **Licenses** are issued by states to allow professionals in the specified field to practice in that jurisdiction.
     - Each state sets its own requirements for education and training for each profession it recognizes, although this is usually similar to national certification standards.
   - **Typically, each state's Department of Health has a division of health-related boards to oversee the licensure process.**
I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
   B. Professional Licensing / Certification
   - Of course there are exceptions to all of this!
     - Some helping professionals may be licensed in a related professional field and certified by a national association in their chosen profession.
     - For example a Registered Art Therapist (ATR) may be licensed as a psychologist (Licensed Psychologist), clinical social worker (LCSW), or professional counselor (LPC).
     - Eric Amsel, MSW, ATR, LCSW.

   Other professionals may have dual credentials.
   - For example, a person may be licensed as both a professional counselor (LPC) and a marriage and family therapist (LMFT).
   - A clinical social worker (LCSW) may also be certified as an employee assistance professional (CEAP).
   - This makes for extra designations on their business cards, letterheads, and phone listings.

I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
   C. Degrees
   - Almost all of the helping professions require training beyond a bachelor's degree.
     - Most master's degrees consist of from 36 to 60 semester hours (1 - 3 years)
     - Doctorates typically require 90 to 100 semester hrs. (about 4 years)
   - NOTE: some institutions of higher learning reverse the order of the initials making things complicated!
     - For example, *Master of Arts* may be abbreviated *A.M.* instead of the usual *M.A.*

I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS
   C. Degrees
   - As noted, some helping professions have requirements for a doctorate degree.
     - Professions such as psychiatry and clinical psychology require their *practitioners* to earn doctorates.
     - Other professions (Social Work) only require doctorates to *teach* in the profession
       - Academic Degrees
         - Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy).
       - Professional Degrees
         - M.D. (Medical Doctor), Psy.D. (Doctor of Psychology), and D.S.W. (Doctor of Social Work)
I. THE HELPING PROFESSIONS

C. Degrees

- Others in the helping professions require Masters Degrees
  - Often 2 or 3 years after the bachelor degree
  - Helping professionals requiring master degrees (such as an MA, MS, or MSW) include professional counselors and social workers

- Still others in the helping professions have religiously-oriented degrees.
  - Some graduate training programs in the helping professions are offered by seminaries and religiously-oriented colleges and universities.
  - Degrees from these institutions may reflect the religious content of the training
    - D.Min. (Doctor of Ministry), M.Div. (Masters of Divinity) or MAR (Master of Arts in Religion).
  - Others offer the more familiar degrees as well (such as MA or MS).

D. Certification Boards

Certification Boards are formed by professional associations in order to establish standards for education and training for members of the profession.

- Boards create exams that ensure prospective professionals can demonstrate a knowledge of critical elements of the profession.
- Boards usually also set standards for continuing professional education, and monitor members in compliance.

E. Professional Associations

- Professional Associations are federations of practitioners of a given profession
  - Most national associations have regional and state affiliates or chapters as well.
  - Many other countries have similar associations of their own.
II. TOOLS OF THE TRADE
A. Introduction

- The acronyms used in jargon of these in the helping profession are extensive.
- Knowledge of the acronyms reflects socialization into the world of the helping professions.
- This is particularly true for knowledge of acronyms of the tools of the trade of the helping professions
  - Diagnoses
  - Instruments
  - Psychotherapies

II. TOOLS OF THE TRADE
B. Diagnostic Systems

- There are two major systematic classifications of diseases and conditions in use in the United States.
  - Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)
  - International Classification of Diseases (ICD)
- Both systems are regularly updated as scientific knowledge increases and opinions of professionals change about the nature of disease.

II. TOOLS OF THE TRADE
C. Instruments

- Diagnostic effectiveness depends on the use of various tests and measurements.
  - There are many hundreds of tests and measurement devices that are used widely in the helping professions
  - Many more tests and measures are developed and published each.
  - Not all are valid or reliable. To check on the validity and reliability of a test, see information from the Boros Institute.

II. TOOLS OF THE TRADE
D. Psychotherapy

- There are more than five hundred theories of counseling and psychotherapy.
  - Many of these are not referred to by acronyms, such as psychoanalysis, gestalt therapy, and client-centered therapy.
  - But many are and many of these are very well known and practiced by may in the helping professions.
  - However, other of these theories or methods are not accepted by all mental health professionals.