

The Whole House: Advancing the Profession

By Cynthia Chrisman, MPH, CCH

I. Homeopathic Self-Regulation: Protecting Your Practice

Virtually every member of the North American Society of Homeopaths (NASH) holds a Certification in Classical Homeopathy (CCH) from the Council for Homeopathic Certification (CHC). On the other hand, only half of the 500 CCH holders in North America are listed as members on the NASH website. A key benefit of belonging to a membership organization like NASH is to provide the collective voice needed to sustain the increased public visibility of CCH professionals. Over the last 25 years, the number of CCH professionals has increased steadily. I believe it is imperative for CCH holders to articulate the value of their CHC certification to colleagues and public alike. With the growth of integrative medicine and the expansion of licensed integrative medical specialties in North America,^{1,2} a joint educational mission by the CHC and a designated membership organization like NASH will raise our future visibility. It would be beneficial if the CHC encouraged CHC-certified practitioners to join a designated member association. In turn, a membership association can contribute by inviting more and more CCH holders to join. NASH no longer requires a CCH certification to qualify for membership, as it opened membership to all practitioners who meet its criteria. Direct endorsement of our national credential by a membership organization such as NASH is crucial to help complete the educational bridge of homeopathy into the future.

Our profession is on the verge of presenting its strongest, most organized voice to the integrative health movement. The Integrative Health Policy Consortium (IHPC) may come to view us as an “emerging” profession; the National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) represents the consumer’s voice for homeopathy within this group. The IHPC’s Partners for Health Program is composed of non-profit educational and advocacy organizations from across the complementary and integrative health and medicine spectrum.³ As I see it, our profession has long since emerged and it is time to unveil the strength of our alternative system of health care delivery at a national level

through robust advocacy for the professional homeopath as well as consumers.

In this article, I explain the benefits of homeopathic self-regulation and why I support the CHC. I outline the history of homeopathic self-regulation in North America and its three interrelated branches. These branches are: 1) *the academy*, 2) *the examination board*, and 3) *the professional association*. I will present the advantage of accreditation in the education, training and practice standards for the CCH professional. I will argue that the promotion of self-regulation activities by NASH, or by a CCH special interest group, will increase our professional autonomy in health care delivery. NASH can join an indispensable and equal partnership to promote homeopathic self-regulation. The potential leadership role of professional member groups is vital to attracting more students to homeopathy and to nurturing the autonomy of every CCH practitioner.

A. The Benefit of Homeopathic Self-Regulation and Why I Support the CHC

I serve on the CHC board of directors because I have personally experienced how a professional certification and renewal process reinforces the autonomy and security I enjoy as a CCH practitioner. I first volunteered in 2012 to help complete a detailed “job task analysis” project needed to qualify for eventual accreditation with the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE).

My previous article, “Putting The House in Order,”⁴ explains that CHC holders cannot vote. The CHC oversees a rigorous examination and certification process based on international standards of homeopathic education, clinical training and professional practice. Eligibility for certification takes place after completion of stated educational and clinical prerequisites for professional practice. The entire profession of homeopathy in North America has established and advanced a well-defined scope of standardized education, clinical training and professional practice. This is an essential

organizational step in the birth and development of every recognized profession.

By contrast, a professional membership organization like NASH represents its voting members who qualify for and receive a designation of membership based on criteria set by the group. Although professional associations often invite students to join, they typically designate membership only after completion of accredited degrees, diplomas, licenses and/or credentials in education and training. To boost professional status, additional application criteria may be required. Although a membership designation is distinct, it is not customarily reflected in a professional title after one's name. For the ease of public recognition and to reduce confusion, earned professional titles generally include higher education degrees, diplomas or professional certifications or licenses. Those using professional titles need to understand the important distinction between qualifications of educational training and scope of practice versus qualifications for designations of membership in a professional association.

ICE is an independent, nongovernmental organization that advances the value of CHC certification through its accrediting body, the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). Independent of whether or not a member of ICE is a licensed profession, the credibility of a profession's certification program increases when ICE measures the competence of that profession. ICE clients include licensed and unlicensed health-related professions who do not require governmental oversight and licensure.⁵ Unlicensed health professionals would include homeopaths in addition to others, such as specialists or technicians in respiratory care, medical assisting, and fitness and wellness care.

The CHC's current membership in ICE helps to advance homeopathy as an accredited profession. The application process for NCCA takes months of careful preparation. It requires a formalized review of our profession's education, examination, research, advocacy and practice standards. Since my involvement in this project, I better understand and appreciate the need for strengthening homeopathic self-regulation in today's health care climate. Despite its perceived constraints, I believe that accreditation of the CHC certification program adds needed stability as our profession expands.

B. The History of Homeopathic Self-Regulation and its Three Branches

The term, *profess* means to declare openly. It comes from the Latin word *professus, pro-fateri*: to acknowledge publicly. A profession bases its authority to practice on publicly recognized knowledge, skills, abilities and principles. CCH practitioners embrace a simple and clear mission statement: *To advance the homeopathic profession by certifying individuals who meet and maintain a recognized standard of professional*

*and ethical competence in classical homeopathy and to assist the general public in choosing appropriately qualified homeopaths.*⁶

The term *self-regulation* refers to individuals or organizations that regulate and govern their own conduct; they develop, oversee and enforce their publicly stated policies.

Self-regulation requires complete transparency and accountability in all functions of its community governance. Every profession must harmonize the diverse yet interrelated functions of higher education, clinical training and professional practice. The foundational principles of classical homeopathy, our beacon in homeopathic practice, enable our profession to articulate its educational standards and competencies. CCH professionals, by their mission, pledge to resist working "under the radar" in isolation from each other or the public. However long my CCH certification remains active, I will remain accountable to my colleagues but, more importantly, to the public.

Professional homeopaths have successfully collaborated over the last 25 years to create a unified public identity that sustains our ability to practice. Since the 1990s, many dedicated leaders have defined and advanced homeopathic self-regulation. This history deepened our resolve to emerge from the shadows in collaboration with each other for the good of the whole. Health-related professions in the early stages of development would elect, initially, to form membership alliances or registries for schools, teachers and students who meet self-determined standards. As seen in today's yoga community, for instance, members are accepted only after receiving a training certificate from a school that meets and maintains standards set by the registry. Affiliated schools, teachers and graduates are granted designation levels on an internal registry.⁷ Homeopathy has outgrown the framework of a registry. The profession now encompasses more broadly organized national standards of self-regulation activities.

I am impressed by the CCH professionals who are lending their many talents to one of the three functional branches of self-regulation. To build momentum and encourage collaboration, we ought to urge every CCH practitioner to participate in homeopathic self-regulation by lending their expertise where they can. The three functional branches which constitute homeopathic self-regulation in North America are: 1) *the academy*, 2) *the examination board*, and 3) *the professional association*.

Each branch requires organizational independence to prevent obvious conflicts of interest. But we must promote inter-dependence as *equal leaders* in education, training and practice of CCH professionals. The following organizations correspond to the three branches named above:

1) The Academy: Accreditation Commission for Homeopathic Education in North America (ACHENA)

ACHENA represents the academy. It functions to uphold community-established standards of higher education in homeopathic training. ACHENA accreditation of school programs bolsters national standards for the training of professional homeopaths. ACHENA complies with nongovernmental, peer evaluation accreditation standards by monitoring the standards and practices of homeopathic educational institutions and also continuing education training activities. Funds from the wider homeopathic community will enable ACHENA to seek recognition by the U.S. Department of Education, assisting students in their careers. ACHENA builds public trust in homeopathy by ensuring that schools seeking accreditation and students qualifying for federal student loan resources receive due process. Two accredited homeopathic schools exist in North America and seven more are on the path to ACHENA accreditation.⁸

2) The Examination Board: Council for Homeopathic Certification (CHC)

The CHC represents *the examination board*. It functions to uphold the national standards of professional behavior and competencies of practice in classical homeopathy. The CHC certification exam requires applicants to meet rigorous higher education and clinical training standards. Certification exams aim to test the individual's level of competence, validated knowledge, skills and abilities, in order to establish their professional fitness to practice.

This branch's function is distinct from compliance with a government-regulated licensing board or achievement of a one-time training program certificate. The CHC maintains a continuing competency program for meeting recertification criteria. The CHC grants the professional title, Certification in Classical Homeopathy (CCH), which must be renewed upon completion of continuing education requirements throughout the career of the practitioner. Recently, the CHC has begun verifying the national standards of education and training through the ICE accreditation of the CCH exam.

3) The Professional Association: North American Society of Homeopaths (NASH)

NASH is one of five homeopathic professional membership or trade associations in North America (described below) that constitute *the membership*. Its mission is to "promote the highest level of excellence in homeopathic practice while enhancing the role of the profession as an integral part of health care delivery." NASH represents the independent professional homeopath and grants the internationally respected designation, Registry of the Society of Homeopaths, North America (RSHom (NA)).

One need no longer pass the CHC exam to join. For those without a CCH, NASH conducts eligibility determination reviews. A determination is based on whether the applicant "demonstrates their knowledge and ability to practice classical homeopathy to a professional standard." The NASH website lists six criteria for approval¹⁰ including at least 500 training hours with "recognized teachers/mentors or a homeopathic school." Additional criteria for all applicants include written case submission from independent practice with at least six months' follow-up.

Other membership groups list eligibility criteria on their respective websites.¹¹ These groups are:

- The Homeopathic Nurses Association (HNA) represents the special interests of nurses who use homeopathy; it has no member designation.
- The Homeopathic Academy of Naturopathic Physicians (HANP) represents the special interests of naturopathic physicians who use homeopathy and grants the title, DHANP.
- The American Institute of Homeopathy (AIH) represents the special interests of licensed physicians who use homeopathy and grants the title, DHt.
- National Center for Homeopathy (NCH) represents the consumer and welcomes all homeopathic practitioners in their professional directory. NCH membership has no member designation.

II. The Advantage of Accreditation and Homeopathic Self-Regulation

Accredited professions elect to operate under public scrutiny when they disclose their self-regulatory procedures and agree to guard against conflicts of interest wherever possible. Upon the completion of its accreditation process, the CHC will demonstrate that our profession's certification exam statistically verifies that we actually educate and test for the knowledge, skills and abilities we claim to perform in practice. I believe that ACHENA, the CHC and NASH should collectively promote and safeguard the importance of verifying and promoting the claim of exam validity and its reproducibility (exam reliability) to sustain the continuing growth of CCH professionals.

The Fundamental Benefit and Challenge of Homeopathic Self-Regulation

Professional homeopaths must now assess whether and/or when to join the expansion of self-regulation activities through accreditation in homeopathy. Our profession defines our scope of practice, grants right to title (i.e. educational diplomas, credentials to practice and membership designations) and resolves grievances registered by the students and public served. As "gatekeepers," all branches agree that rigorous entrance and completion standards in higher education promote professionalism. Our diverse profession deserves

to be recognized for the good work it does, but we must accept the duty to articulate how we work and how we intend to regulate our fundamental standards of practice. Accredited education and national certification foster best practices through examination and maintenance of competence over a practitioner's career.

The challenge in self-regulation is compliance with, and peer-enforcement of, professional certification responsibilities. The accreditation of homeopathic academies and the CHC certification program protects us against the constraints of outside regulatory influences in the expanding integrative health field. Accreditation is the appropriate means our profession has to sustain our viability and freedom to practice.

Conclusion. Promoting Self-Regulation: A Three-Legged Stool

In summary, membership associations grant members a valuable credential based on criteria that may include, but do not replace, the rewards of professional education, certification and competence. To protect the autonomy and livelihood of its individual members, *the professional association* should also promote self-regulation protocols by supporting *the academy and the examination board*.

Homeopathic self-regulation is like a three-legged stool. A balance between each of the three equal branches gives needed stability to our profession going forward. All other independent and special interest members in homeopathy ought also to be welcomed as collaborators in the endeavors of the profession.

Because CCH homeopaths are committed stakeholders, it is in their interest to monitor training, certification and practice using measurable and reliable standards of ethical behavior and competency. Accreditation of our professional schools through ACHENA and the CHC certification reinforce accepted standards of excellence that will gain allies inside and outside the profession. The collaborative role of a membership association like NASH is clearly needed here. If we believe that one branch has a greater stake than another it defeats our ultimate purpose.

An Opportunity to Strike a Balance

NASH is an essential partner with both ACHENA and the CHC. A membership association like NASH can reinforce and strengthen the education, advancement and protection of the CCH homeopath. The combined efforts of NASH, the CHC and ACHENA will build client trust. I hope that all professional homeopaths will come together to protect, promote and share our healing art. Will the whole house of our profession reach for completeness?

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Professional homeopathic associations in North America.

Cynthia Chrisman, MPH, CCH, is a full-time classical homeopath who has integrated post-graduate education in chronic miasmatic case management with degrees in psychology and holistic public health promotion. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for the CHC and maintains family practices in Cambridge and western Massachusetts. Previous articles for the American Homeopath include "The Crowning Jewel of Homeopathy" (2014) and "Putting the House in Order" (2015). Contact Cynthia at www.homeopathicprovider.com.