

## LICENSURE IS COMING, BUT ARE YOU READY! MaryBeth Pozzuto, CTRS

There are times when we come away from a session at a conference and are struck by the message that was conveyed. I had this experience the other day at the Downstate Conference when I attended Dr. Robin Kunstler's session on "Expanding the Professional Therapeutic Recreation Environment". As a member of the NYS TR Licensure Committee I listened as Robin opened the door to issues we need to focus on as we continue our pursuit of licensure in New York State.

Much of our committee's attention thus far has been geared towards getting the word out about licensure, encouraging our fellow recreational therapy colleagues to write letters, make phone calls, and meet with local legislators. However, there is a question I have. Have we also educated our colleagues in the field about additional ways to gear up for licensure prior to it actually happening? Somewhat, but we need to do a better job.

Robin's session did just that!

She challenged everyone in the room to think about how our programs are defined by our profession, appear to our administration, and most importantly to our patients/clients. Do we typically have **recreation** programs where the focus is on **activities**? ("Activities are used for fun, socialization, relaxation; allow for learning and practice of skills"), or is our program a **therapeutic recreation** program that includes "interventions directed toward achieving an outcome, weather it be functional or existential."

She challenged both the experienced therapist and new grads in the audience to take responsibility for developing this profession. Those with experience, become a mentor, be visible, educate and empower others. As a recreation therapist take initiative, take pride in your work, start a "pilot program" that focuses on the therapeutic value of recreation, and develop your skills in communication and documentation.

As we pursue licensure, these are some of the issues that will directly have an impact on our profession.

Robin contacted the four other states that currently hold licensure and asked the question:

**"What has been the effect of TR Licensure in your state?"**

***Utah:** There are better qualified people and better educated therapists now who see there is a responsibility to follow the standards of practice and*

*have such things as written plans of action, stronger requirements for interns and minimal standards for new hires.*

***New Hampshire:** Having licensure has affirmed the value of having qualified professionals providing services in the state of NH. Genesis Healthcare, has been actively hiring CTRSs in our long term care facilities especially to work with short stay patients and to provide treatment interventions for our long term residents who have dementia. We have had a few cases where the RT Governing Board has issued sanctions to practitioners and we also sanctioned an agency that indicated that they were providing RT but had no CTRSs on staff. The key element is not so much an affirmation of RT as it is a recognition that people can in fact be harmed when they do not receive services from a qualified professional*

***Oklahoma:** The primary purpose for licensure is to protect the public. However there are obviously other benefits that can be difficult to measure. Recognition of our profession by other licensed health care professionals is certainly a big one. I believe that TR's in Oklahoma are very proud of their license and we had the highest involvement in our state conference from practicing TR's immediately after we achieved licensure. I believe we have to stick to increased professionalism and protecting the public when we speak about the importance of State Licensure.*

***North Carolina:** When you do licensure, you raise the bar and all need to attend to their practice and the maintenance of their credentials. Respect is earned by performance not the credential. I think in general, folks are proud to be LRT. Agencies are realizing that RT is not activities. LRT's have to deliver RT vs recreation. It has better defined the profession and services delivered.*

If you've come across the NYS TR Licensure Committee information tables at conferences, you certainly have seen the brochures that state: **The Time is Now!** The time is now to support licensure, make necessary programmatic changes, and begin to change your scope of practice. Start to communicate with your colleagues &/or administrators, bring RT to a higher level. Licensure will happen...will you be ready?