

Western Australian Reproductive Technology Council

Information about Reproductive Technology Council recognition of 'approved counsellors'

1.0 Background

The *Human Reproductive Technology Act 1991* (WA) (Act) came into operation on 8 April 1993. This Act makes clear that prior to any consent being given, participants, receiving certain assisted reproductive treatments in clinics licensed under the Act, must be provided with a '*suitable opportunity to receive proper counselling*' [S 22(7)]. Furthermore, it is also clear that regulations or the Code of Practice may '*establish criteria as to the qualifications of counsellors*' [S18 (2) (a)]. To this end the Directions and Guidelines given by the Commissioner of Health, on the advice of the Reproductive Technology Council (the Council), have established how this counselling is to be provided by those clinics licensed under the Act. The Council also aims to promote the availability of infertility-related counselling of a high standard in the wider community.

The Council has established criteria for the recognition of suitably trained and qualified counsellors as 'approved counsellors' for the purposes of the Act.

To be considered suitably trained and qualified to provide the counselling services required within clinics licensed under the Act, the Directions require that an '*approved clinic counsellor*' be *both* recognised by the Council as an 'approved counsellor', *and* be eligible for full membership of the Australian and New Zealand Infertility Counsellors' Association (ANZICA).

To achieve recognition as an 'approved counsellor' an applicant must be able to demonstrate:

- appropriate university recognised training and qualifications in counselling theory and technique, involving counselling as an integral and recognisable part of that training;
- substantial and satisfactory supervised, post-training counselling experience in an applied setting utilising therapeutic skills; and
- reasonable knowledge of life span issues associated with infertility and psychosocial issues in infertility treatment.

2.0 Criteria for approval of counsellors

2.1 Essential criteria

i) Appropriate training and qualifications in counselling theory and technique, as indicated by substantial academic qualifications, recognised by a university, involving counselling as an integral and recognisable part of that training

Applicants must produce documentary evidence that they have completed a university recognised counselling course.

These courses must include both:

- 1 counselling theory undertaken in a university recognised course, covering at least two theoretical counselling approaches; and
- 2 counselling practice comprising substantial supervised course work.

ii) Substantial and satisfactory supervised, post-training counselling experience in an applied setting utilising therapeutic skills

Applicants must provide detailed evidence of satisfactory therapeutic case work which follows their training in counselling, to show that they have been supervised for approximately one hour per week over two years. This experience may be in more than one area, but the applicant must outline their therapeutic clinical experience, the way the supervision was conducted and name their supervisor as one of their referees. The supervisor must be a counsellor who has a recognised formal qualification and at least two years' postgraduate training supervision and three years' post training experience.

Specific areas of post training clinical and therapeutic counselling experience that may be relevant include:

- relationship issues; grief and loss counselling; problem solving/decision making; stress management;
- crisis counselling; sexuality counselling; life options counselling; pre-donation counselling; pre-recipient counselling; known donation family counselling; psychotherapy for conditions related to medical treatment (eg needle phobias); treatment outcome counselling.

Note: it is not envisaged that counsellors will possess *all* these skills. Expertise in the above areas could be developed as part of clinical practice in this field.

iii) Reasonable knowledge of life span issues associated with infertility and psychosocial issues in infertility treatment

Applicants must be able to provide evidence of reasonable knowledge of life span issues associated with infertility and psychosocial issues in infertility treatment. These include a reasonable understanding of aspects of the Human Reproductive Technology Act that may have counselling implications. Applicants must provide

details of the method by which this knowledge has been obtained, eg course work; work experience; personal experience. Work or personal experience must be substantial. One of the referees named should be able to report on the applicant's knowledge of these issues. As currently there are no specific training programs in this area, the Council encourages and endorses special training programs on these infertility issues for time to time. An applicant not able to meet this criterion may be eligible for Conditional Approval.

2.2 Desirable criterion

Broad clinical experience that includes assessment and diagnostic skills.

Note

Applicants who cannot demonstrate that they fit the essential criteria as listed above, but who believe they can demonstrate by other means that they meet the essential criteria, may apply, outlining their qualifications and experience.

Applicants from regional and/or rural Western Australia may be recognised as 'approved counsellors' when *all* conditions are not met. This is to ensure that participants of infertility treatment from regional and rural areas are not deprived of counselling. However, as far as possible, appropriately qualified and experienced counsellors are sought to provide this type of counselling.

2.3 Conditional approval

Conditional approval may be granted in special circumstances, subject to conditions appropriate to the situation.

The Council may grant conditional approval to an applicant, for a period specified in the approval, on the demonstration of what the Council believes to be appropriate training and clinical experience in counselling. During the period of conditional approval such conditions as are set by the Council, on the advice of the Counselling Committee, must be met. These conditions may vary according to the areas of professional experience of the counsellor. This type of conditional approval may apply, for example, when an experienced counsellor is commencing practice in the field of infertility, based on an understanding to gain knowledge of infertility issues.

During the period of conditional approval, the counsellor's name will not be published on the list of 'approved counsellors' that is circulated by the Council and updated from time to time.

Suitable Alternatives in Training, Experience, and Knowledge of Approved Counsellors

An approved counsellor should fulfil at least one requirement for each column in the table below

Appropriate training in counselling	Counselling experience	Knowledge of infertility
<p>University recognised training and qualifications in counselling theory and technique, involving counselling as an integral and recognisable part of such training, such as:</p>	<p>Substantial and satisfactory supervised post-training therapeutic counselling experience.</p>	<p>A reasonable knowledge of life span issues associated with infertility and psychosocial issues in infertility treatment gained, for example:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University 4-Year degree in Psychology or Social Work; or ▪ University 3-Year (+) degree in one of the social sciences, plus a university recognised postgraduate qualification involving counselling as an integral and recognisable part of that qualification. 	<p>Detailed evidence of satisfactory supervised therapeutic case work following counselling training, for approximately one hour per week over two years. This should be in several of the areas set out above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Course or training program covering fertility/infertility; ▪ Extensive work experience in the fertility/infertility area; or ▪ Extensive personal experience in the fertility/infertility area.

3.0 How a counsellor should apply for recognition as an 'approved counsellor'

An application from a counsellor for recognition by the Council should:

- include evidence of attendance at least 4 Reproductive Technology Council, endorsed ART events such as RTC Seminars, Approved Counsellors' quarterly meetings, FSA meetings, ANZICA workshops;
- be made in writing to the Reproductive Technology Council, documenting claims to meeting the essential criteria;
- include the names and addresses of three persons able to provide professional references to support the application, at least two of whom should be able to make reference to the counselling experience, abilities or relevant expertise that are to be demonstrated in support of the applicant's claim to meet the essential criteria; and
- include also your professional addresses and contact details such as telephone and fax numbers, and your preferred address for general correspondence.

4.0 Approval

4.1 Process

Applicants will be referred by the Council for the consideration of the Counselling Committee and that Committee's recommendations regarding approval will be submitted to the Council for ratification.

4.2 Terms of approval

Approval will normally be recommended for a three-year term, with the right to reapply. In the event of a request for re-approval, the approved counsellor should re-apply three months prior to the expiration of the current approval.

4.3 Conditions of approval

Conditions may be placed on any approval, for example, requiring ongoing training, monitoring and supervision. During this period of *conditional approval*, the counsellor's name will not be published on the list of 'approved counsellors'.

An *'approved clinic counsellor'* in a licensed practice is required to submit a report to the Council by 31 July each year, detailing all counselling sessions offered in the practice during the previous financial year in relation to the requirements of the Act, as required by the Council.

From time to time, the Council may set out what evidence is to be considered at the time of application for extension of the term of approval.

5.0 Evidence to be considered at the time of re-recognition of an 'approved counsellor'

As allowed for under 4.2 above, when an 'approved counsellor', whose term of appointment is expiring, applies for re-recognition by the Council, the following factors are important:

- Each counsellor will be responsible for re-applying for recognition, and failure of the Council to remind the counsellor that their term of appointment is expiring will not be cause for a complaint, although the Council will usually issue this reminder;
- When considering an application for re-recognition, the Council will consider evidence of the counsellor's ongoing education and involvement in the area of infertility during the term of recognition.

Evidence that should be provided to demonstrate that this has been adequate may include details of the counsellor's infertility case load and information indicating how relevant knowledge and skills have been developed during the term of recognition.

For example, evidence of:

- attendance at the Fertility Society of Australia's Annual Scientific Meeting, or similar conferences or meetings;
- attendance and/or participation in council workshops and seminars;
- active membership of relevant professional groups such as a group of clinic counsellors;
- active membership of a relevant patient support group; and
- participation in formal education in the area,
all may be suitable.