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Administrative Order
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SUBJECT: Guidelines in the Accreditation of Marriage Counselors (MCs)

The following guidelines are hereby promulgated to define the standards in the accreditation of Marriage Counselors (MCs).

A. RATIONALE

Marriage is a permanent union that requires not only emotional involvement but also an information - based decision to fulfill the obligation of the conjugal relationship and the ensuing family life. It is considered the first requirement to have a family, which in turn becomes the foundation of the nation. Today however, the stability of the family is threatened by marital dissolution, infidelity, overseas employment of spouses, working wives, unplanned pregnancy and early marriage which pose as threats to marital relationships. The magnitude of marital break-ups in the country is difficult to ascertain due to limited empirical research, but there are some studies shedding light to the causes of marital quarrels and eventual separation. Some of the causes identified by these studies are irresponsibility, emotional immaturity; financial disagreements; incompatibility; conflict with in-laws; marital infidelity and jealousy.

In line with promoting healthy, stable and functional families, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) developed the Marriage Counseling Service (MCS). In keeping with the DSWD's mandate to ensure quality service by the intermediaries, the accreditation of service providers implementing Marriage Counseling Service is called for. Accreditation of marriage counselors by the Department is supported by provisions stipulated in the Family Code of the Philippines, to wit:

"Articles 16: In cases where parental consent or advise is needed, the party or parties concerned shall, in addition to the requirements of the preceding articles, attach a certificate issued by a priest, imam or minister authorized to solemnize marriage under Article 7 of this code or a marriage counselor duly accredited by proper government agency to the effect that the contracting parties have undergone marriage counseling." The Civil Code Revision Committee, UP Law Center in its letter dated September 23, 1988 to the National Statistics Office clarified this provision that DSWD is the proper government agency to accredit marriage counselors.

"Article 59: No legal separation may be decreed unless the Court has taken steps towards the reconciliation of the spouses and is fully satisfied, despite such efforts, that reconciliation is highly improbable."

Further, such mandate was complemented by NEDA Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1, series of 2002 where DSWD is committed to provide accreditation of marriage counselors.

Thus, accreditation of marriage counselors is conducted to:

1. give authority to marriage counselor/s to implement marriage counseling service in any area in the country;
2. give authority to marriage counselors to:
 - a. issue Pre - Marriage Counseling certificate/s by Pre-Marriage Counseling (PMC) team (as required by Article 16 of the Family Code and as stipulated in Joint Memorandum Circular No. 01 on Revised Pre-Marriage Counseling Implementing Guidelines between and among the DOH, POPCOM, DILG and DSWD), to about-to-be-married couples applying for license to marry who have completed the prescribed pre-marriage counseling session/s.
 - b. provide case study report to referring court to include counselor's intervention and recommendations based on his/her assessment of the couple's decision and agreements in the case of couples who filed petition for legal separation as required by Art. 59 of the Family Code;

B. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. **Marriage Counseling Service (MCS)** – refers to professionally guiding / assisting couples:
 - a) contemplating marriage towards an informed and responsible decision about contracting marriage; b) enrich the marital relationship; c) resolve marital conflicts; and, d) who filed a petition for legal separation to arrive at a decision for the best interests of their children and each other. It is implemented through the following interventions:
 - a) **Pre-Marriage Counseling (PMC)** which aims to provide would-be-couples with a basis for making an informed and responsible decision about whether to marry or not;
 - b) **Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC)** which aims to help married couples to:
 - b-1. renew and enhance their marital friendship and intimacy, and
 - b-2. deepen their marital morality and spirituality.
 - c) **Marital Crisis Counseling (MCC)** which aims to help married couples to:
 - c-1. experience the process of emotional and psychological healing,
 - c.2. gain an objective perspective of their marital situation,
 - c.3. identify areas for behavioral change and improvement,
 - c.4. identify strengths and areas of reinforcement,
 - c.5. acquire and apply techniques for effective communication and conflict resolution, and
 - d) **Trial Separation Counseling (TSC)** which aims to:
 - a.1. motivate the couple in making a final effort at reconciliation.
 - a.2. accompany them through a process of psycho-spiritual discernment.

2. **Marriage Counselor (MC)** - refers to an individual who meets the requirements for accreditation set forth by the DSWD to provide Marriage Counseling Service (MCS) covering any or all of the above-named interventions:
3. **Accreditation** – refers to the authority bestowed by DSWD to an individual, evidenced by a Certificate of Accreditation to provide any or all of the FOUR (4) interventions of marriage counseling service. It is a recognition of the practitioner's expertise to provide all or any of the above interventions.

C. COVERAGE

Accreditation shall cover social workers and other professionals providing marriage counseling from any of the following offices / organizations, except those authorized to solemnize marriage.

1. Social Welfare and Development;
2. Health,
3. Education
4. Agriculture
5. Local Government Units (LGUs)
6. Population / Nutrition
7. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs)
8. Parish church and or church locales, religious groups
9. Other legitimate organizations

D. STANDARDS

1. Marriage Counselor

- a. Must be graduate of social work or any behavioral and social science courses.

While counseling skills can be developed by a person through training and practice, a basic knowledge on human personality, interpersonal relationship and dynamics of family life is significant to be possessed by a prospective marriage counselor.

- b. Must be a person respected in the community.

It is important that marriage counselors are role models in the community. They do not engage in activities considered immoral or unacceptable in the community and have no criminal or civil cases filed against them.

- c. Must have attended training / seminar and other forms of continuing education on marriage counseling conducted by DSWD and other DSWD recognized entities.
- d. Must be able to demonstrate skills in conducting marriage counseling to include among others: listening; leading; reflecting; summarizing; confronting; interpreting; and informing

2. Venue for Marriage Counseling Service

- a. There must be a designated venue for marriage counseling service (MCS) which shall promote an atmosphere of privacy and interaction between the marriage counselor and the counselee/s.
- b. The designated venue must be well ventilated, well lighted and free from any form of distraction and disturbance.
- c. The physical comfort provided by the counseling venue shall contribute to the quality of communication between the counselor and counselee/s

3. Records Management

- a. Appropriate forms for marriage counseling service must be adequately and accurately accomplished by the counselor.

Completeness and accuracy of information in the accomplished forms are significant resources in the counseling process. Information to be derived from these forms can also be used for research purpose/s in the development of marriage counseling service. These forms shall include, but are not limited, to the following:

- Accomplished intake forms which provide the profile of counselees;
- Accomplished marriage expectation inventory (MEI) forms must provide initial inventory of about – to be – married couples' marriage expectations regarding marriage and family life;
- Documentation of marriage counseling sessions must provide important recordings of highlights of counseling sessions conducted.
- Marriage counseling certificate/s.
- Other documents shall include:
 - Referral letter from the local Civil Registrar;
 - Referral letter from the Court/s for couples who have filed for petition for legal separation;

- b. Recordings of pre-marriage counseling sessions must be kept confidential.

There shall be a designated filing cabinet for all case folders where only authorized persons shall have access to documents. Although, there may be instances when recordings and documents pertaining to specific cases may be shared with significant professionals or authorized persons, these shall be done with utmost professional, legal and ethical considerations.

E. REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF MARRIAGE COUNSELOR

1. Certificate of graduation / college diploma;
2. Certificate of completed training on marriage counseling conducted by the DSWD, Center for Family Ministries (CEFAM) or other DSWD recognized entities;
3. Character references from at least three (3) persons not related to the applicant;

4. Certification from immediate supervisor, as applicable;
5. Documentation of marriage counseling sessions conducted;
6. In cases of renewal, the requirements for accreditation are:
 - Certificate of training attended or refresher course of at least 120 hours.
 - Summary of marriage counseling sessions conducted;

F. PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION

1. **Application for Accreditation.** The applicant shall send letter of intent for accreditation along with earlier mentioned requirements to the DSWD Field Offices concerned, specifying the type of expertise for accreditation applied for.

An application for accreditation refers to a letter of intent to be accredited in **any** or **all** of the of FOUR (4) interventions of marriage counseling service stated in item B.1

2. **Assessment.** Concerned Field Offices shall inform the Standards Bureau of the application for appropriate assessment, specifying therein the areas / expertise for accreditation.

An assessment visit shall be negotiated through the concerned Field Office with the applicant, the soonest possible time. Interview and observation shall form part of the assessment covering knowledge - skills - attitude (KSA) requirements of the specified interventions of marriage counseling applied for, to wit:

Pre-Marriage Counseling Service (PMC)

1. Human maturity;
2. Value clarification;
3. Authentic Love.

Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC)

1. Building Each Other's Self-esteem;
2. Mutual Empathy and Effective communication;
3. Interpersonal Justice in Man - Woman Roles;
4. Sensuality, Sexuality, and Spirituality in Marriage;
5. Couple-for-others

Marital Crisis Counseling (MCC)

1. Identification of Pain;
2. Ventilation of Pain;
3. Objective and Renewed Insight;
4. Strengths and Dysfunctional Marital Interactions;
5. Marital Growth Process

Trial Separation Counseling (TSC)

1. Motivation to work for a last try, with the help of competent counseling;
2. Integration with the process of discernment - finding God's will.

The results of the assessment shall be communicated to the applicant through the concerned Field Office within fifteen days after the assessment visit. In cases where the assessment falls below the set standards, the said applicant/s shall be given appropriate technical assistance (TA) on specific areas needing improvement, thereafter a re - assessment shall be conducted after six months.

3. **Issuance of accreditation.** Based on the types of accreditation applied for, an appropriate certificate of accreditation as marriage counselor shall be issued by the DSWD through the Standards Bureau in coordination with the concerned Field Office.
4. **Renewal of accreditation.** Renewal of accreditation as marriage counselor providing any of the four service interventions shall be made three (3) years from the first issuance of accreditation and every three years thereafter, while renewal of accreditation as marriage counselor providing all of four interventions shall be made five (5) years from the first issuance of accreditation and every five years thereafter.

The renewal process shall follow Nos. 1 to 3 of the above - cited procedures.

G. BENEFITS OF AN ACCREDITED MARRIAGE COUNSELOR (MC)

An accredited marriage counselor shall be afforded:

1. continuing technical assistance (TA) to include attendance to lecture series, seminars, workshops and other forms of capability building.
2. opportunities to participate in consultation meeting/s, program development, policy formulation and other related activities of the Department.
3. opportunities for inclusion in the list of professionals for scholarships, fellowships and post graduate studies in regional, national and foreign level courses or training relative to marriage counseling.
4. authority/entitlement to charge fee or honorarium for the counseling services rendered from those seeking his / her service based on prevailing rates for the service or the latter's capacity to pay, subject to existing rules and regulations in the locality where he/she is practicing.

II. VALIDITY AND APPLICABILITY

The accreditation shall be issued to prospective marriage counselors who meet the requirements set for the purpose and is non-transferable. Accreditation shall be valid for three (3) years, for those who have provided any of the four interventions and (5) years for those who have provided all the interventions.

I. EFFECTIVITY

These guidelines in the accreditation of Marriage Counselors shall take effect immediately and revokes all other previous issuances contrary to it.

A CERTIFIED COPY:

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Records Officer III

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