

AATA & ATCB Collaborate to Advance the Profession of Art Therapy

The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) supported the ATCB's work to strengthen art therapy credentials (ATR, ATR-BC, ATCS) by voting to relinquish all financial and founding member ties with the ATCB. The ATCB strives to meet the standards set by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the credentialing organization linked with the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE, formerly NOCA), and support its mission '*protect the public by promoting the competent and ethical practice of art therapy.*' AATA has shown their dedication to the advancement of the profession of art therapy by acknowledging the ATCB's efforts to meet the highest standards possible for the art therapy credentials they offer. On March 1, the following statement was released from AATA, in collaboration with the ATCB.

Art Therapy Credentials Board and the American Art Therapy Association Collaborate on the Completion of ATCB's Independent Governance *February 2, 2010*

An art therapy credential has more validity when it is viewed by legislative, educational, occupational and other regulatory bodies as independent from outside influences. Because an accrediting body such as the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) must be able to demonstrate that it has autonomy in decision-making regarding essential certification activities, in the past year the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) Board of Directors thoroughly reviewed the remaining legal ties to the ATCB that might hinder its recognition as a fully autonomous entity. Formal separation of the two corporations is in the best interest of a strong credential and protection of the public. Separation of the two corporations clarifies missions, reduces liability and expense, and removes potential conflicts of interest for both corporations.

In November 2009 the AATA Board approved the process of completing the final separation of the American Art Therapy Association and the Art Therapy Credentials Board, which began nearly two decades before. On February 1, 2010 the AATA Board approved a legal Separation Agreement fully eliminating the previously required AATA involvement in ATCB's governance structure. The two separate entities also agreed through the Separation Agreement to a vital and continuing relationship going forward.

Full independence required that the ATCB Board approve (1) that the provision of membership be eliminated in the ATCB Articles of Incorporation and (2) to eliminate the requirement of ATCB Board representation by AATA members. These two legal actions are incorporated in the AATA Board approved Separation Agreement and have been undertaken by the ATCB's Board, thus eliminating any perceived authority by AATA to control ATCB. Jointly the organizations have now completed the transition. By removing the membership clause, the \$10,000 membership fee the AATA had been paying annually to the ATCB is no longer required. Now the ATCB is a fully independent corporation but bound by the mutually agreed Separation Agreement.

The AATA Board's decision is a significant milestone in the history of the art therapy profession. The American Art Therapy Association has decided to take this action to clearly demonstrate that the core symbols of our profession, art therapy credentials, are conveyed only through rigorous, impartial, and independent review.

It is important to note that the elements of our previously existing Memorandum of Understanding with the ATCB are included as an attachment to the Separation Agreement. We are continuing our mutual commitment to build the field of art therapy and inform the public about the importance of art therapy credentials through a series of on-going activities such as website references, conference attendance, and collaborative work on legislative, global, educational and regulatory efforts that impact the field.

As art therapy has grown, the profession has undergone a natural evolutionary process in the development of a credentialing and certification program. Typically, the development of a fully independent credentialing body follows clearly delineated steps beginning with an associational study; then outlining and setting up of an independent program; and finally establishing a separate corporate entity for the credentials program. Over the years, the American Art Therapy Association has closely followed this model, as has the Art Therapy Credentials Board.

In November 1991 a Resolution passed during the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) Annual Business Meeting that a certification program would be put in place within three years. That action led to the development of the free standing not-for-profit 501 (c) 6 organization that became known as the Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB).

In the intervening eighteen years the ATCB became the strong vibrant organization it is today. Following its mission to '*protect the public by promoting the competent and ethical practice of art therapy,*' the Art Therapy Credentials Board Examination (ATCBE) was developed, and thousands of registered art therapists (ATRs) received their certification and were granted the title of ATR-BC.

The American Art Therapy Association's role in the field is to serve its members and the public by welcoming the membership of professional art therapists and those entering the field; providing a range of benefits that help them in the careers; and, nurturing their continuing education. The Art Therapy Credentials Board's role is to protect the public by granting credentials to those meeting and maintaining the requirements and standards signifying credibility in the field.

Both organizations continue their commitment to promote excellence in the profession of art therapy.

Why is this action important for the AATA Board to undertake at this time?

Our field has been growing for more than four decades and has now evolved to a mature profession that can benefit from an independent review of related credentials. There are several compelling reasons for the completion of the Agreement at this time:

1. Formal separation of the two corporations, the American Art Therapy Association and the Art Therapy Credentials Board, is in the best interest of our membership. Without question it provides clear, legally defined, third party verification of an art therapist's credentials thus strengthening our members' credibility.
2. Leading associations have realized that a totally separate entity for credential services is the most effective and ethical way to manage the various aspects of credential services including review of submitted materials, customer service, addressing concerns about standards for individuals that abuse the system, locator accuracy, and other aspects of credential management. Through this action we are conforming to industry standards so as to position the AATA as progressive.
3. By strengthening credential verification independence, the ATCB reinforces its mission to protect and support the public in making informed decisions about the qualification of art therapists.
4. Credentials conveyed by a strong independent entity have enhanced validity as the American Art Therapy Association approaches legislative issues, seeks licensure or access to it, heightens its public recognition, and seeks to generate funding support from the business sector and private foundations. Independently conveyed credentials indicate that our field is mature.
5. Policing the field and enforcing art therapy credential standards is not only a costly undertaking, but also changes the relationship that the American Art Therapy Association seeks to develop with its members. The AATA does not want the role of the ATCB, nor does it wish to be perceived as having the ATCB's role.
6. Although the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA), the credentialing organization linked with the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE, formerly NOCA) does not expressly forbid a membership organization from being involved in its credentialing arm, the perception of "undue influence" can negatively affect the strength of a profession's credentials.
7. The AATA establishes educational standards and communicates and promotes them. By promoting educational standards, the AATA would be in a conflict of interest to also require or influence credentialing to follow our association's set education policies (that benefit our association through institutional fees) and/or to require membership as an entry for a credential (since the AATA benefits from the membership fees). The AATA does not grant credentials, but respects them as an indication of credibility in the field.
8. Through this action, the AATA leads our field by demonstrating that the core of our profession, its credentials, are granted only after rigorous, impartial review.