Assuring the Competence of Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educators

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Abstract

Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educators, their employers, and Lamaze International all share the responsibility of assuring the public of an educator's ongoing competence.

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Question

I understand that Lamaze International certifies childbirth educators. What I do not understand is how Lamaze International can require continuing education to maintain the certification. If I have passed the test, completed the training, and paid the fee, why do I have to keep coming back for more? Don't I have a right to keep my certification? I am also a certified school teacher. When I became certified as a teacher, it was for life.

—an LCCE in Texas

Answer

You raise a very interesting issue. The big question here is, how do we determine that a professional remains competent in practice, and who is responsible for that determination?

In order to protect the consumer, the competence of a professional must be assessed on a number of occasions. One is at entry into the profession. Lamaze International has a well-recognized certification program to assure the competence of new childbirth educators. Texas (or your state of teacher certification) also has methods to assure competence of new schoolteachers,

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which likely include, for example, completing a university curriculum and passing a national exam. Other points of concern are continuing competence after years of practice and competence upon returning to practice after having left the profession for a number of years.

The introduction of new knowledge and resulting changes are rapid in our culture today and especially rapid in health care. A teacher, nurse, or childbirth educator who met assurances of competence 10, 5, or even 2 years ago may not necessarily be competent today.

Who is responsible for providing the public with some level of assurance of that continuing competence? You suggest that maybe it should be the individual professional. One alternative is to put the entire burden on the professional to assess changes, and to determine his or her learning needs, and to select strategies to meet them. In fact, the professional does share that burden, regardless of what other methods are in place. The employer, who must regularly evaluate performance and, perhaps, supplies continuing education or retesting for essential elements, also shares the burden. In mentioning your teaching certification, you point to the state and to state regulatory agencies as other sources to monitor continued competence. Organizations and boards that certify and license professionals also assume varying degrees of responsibility for implementing measures to assure continuing competence. Lamaze International is one of these organizations. Some people argue that society should just let the “market place” or “individual consumer” decide. Then, the best educators will be in demand and the poor ones will lose clients. When health, safety, or welfare are issues, the public generally rejects this option. That is because it can be very costly to the individual consumer. In addition, the consumer is seldom in the best position to determine the competence of a professional.

What methods can organizations and others use to assess and assure continuing competence? Continuing education is one method. Others include practice hours,

refresher courses, scenario-based or other testing and retesting, peer review, and incident-based discipline (with an emphasis on removing or penalizing incompetent practitioners).

New parents and their other caregivers expect that Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educators have met the qualifications for their practice and are competent, reliable, quality teachers. Lamaze International shares accountability with its educators for assuring the public that they continue to be the best teachers after initial certification. Lamaze International requires certified educators to participate in focused continuing-education programs that are designed to maintain and/or develop their expertise. The individual childbirth educators determine their own abilities and learning needs, incorporate standards into their teaching, and take accountability for their practice.

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Lamaze International takes a leadership role in establishing standards for competence in childbirth education and in communicating these standards through its publications, seminars, and workshops. Lamaze International’s childbirth educator specialist programs in lactation, teen pregnancy, and labor support are an example of communicating standards and providing premium quality opportunities for educators to develop a focus within their teaching and to demonstrate competence to the public.

Any suggestions that you have for developing an improved model to assure the competence of childbirth educators to the public would be welcomed by your colleagues in your local chapter and by national board members. Models for assuring competence must always be re-examined. Costs and advantages of different strategies shift constantly.

In the meantime, to address another part of your question, you can always retain a sense of professional pride that you became a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator. Consumer parents and childbirth professionals—from Marjorie Karmel to you—are part of an organization

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that is and has been *the* leader in a wide and changing world in bringing people together to promote the health

of perinatal women and of new life through education, advocacy, and reform.

Note: “Ask a Lawyer” answers are not official Lamaze International positions and are not intended to substitute for consulting with your own attorney. Nayna Philipsen welcomes your questions. Please send them to “Ask a Lawyer,” Lamaze International, 2025 M Street NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-3309 or via E-mail to naynamom@aol.com.