Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis (HESPA)

A Cooperative Project of the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc.
and the Society for Public Health Education, Inc.

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Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis 2015
Reveals the Latest Roles and Responsibilities of Health Education Specialists

Whitehall, PA -- The Society for Public Health Education, Inc. (SOPHE) and the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. (NCHEC) are pleased to announce the findings of the Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis (HESPA-2015). The results of the 18-month study have implications for professional preparation, credentialing, and professional development of all health education specialists regardless of the setting in which they are employed.

Based on extensive data gathered and analyzed through qualitative and quantitative methods from February 2013 to August 2014, a model of health education practice was updated, refined and validated. The updated model consists of 258 Sub-competencies, organized into 36 Competencies within 7 major Areas of Responsibility. Of the Sub-competencies, 141 (54.7%) were validated as entry-level practice, 117 were validated as advanced-level practice only. Additionally, the knowledge base needed by health education specialists was organized into 10 conceptual topic areas, and 131 knowledge topics were validated as being used health education specialists.

“HESPA-2015 was primarily undertaken to validate the contemporary practice of entry- and advanced-level health education specialists and to guide the development of the Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) and Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES) examinations,” says James F. McKenzie, PhD, MPH, MCHES, professor at Penn State – Hershey, and co-chair of the study. “The comprehensive study is undertaken every five years to identify changes in health education practice since the last major study and to inform professional preparation and continuing education initiatives.”

The latest findings reaffirm 7 major Areas of Responsibility for health education specialists with additional terminology to incorporate the concept of health promotion. Also, Competencies and Sub-competencies were explained and/or expanded in the areas related to advocacy, evaluation, and social media, which reflect the dynamic changes in health education specialists’ roles in recent years.

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Based on the validated survey data, test specifications for the CHES and MCHES examinations also were empirically derived. Test specifications are the recommended percentages of the CHES and MCHES examinations that should comprise questions from each Area of Responsibility and for each Competency within each Area of Responsibility. As a result of these findings, NCHEC is planning on revisions to the MCHES examination in April 2016 and the CHES examination in October 2016.

Dixie Dennis, PhD, MCHES, study co-chair, notes, “A broad section of certified and non-certified health education specialists from all 50 states and Washington, DC, volunteered to participate in the study as members of the HESPA Task Force, independent reviewers, subject matter experts, pilot study participants, and respondents to the formal validation survey. We are grateful to these participants for their time, energy and thoughtful contributions.”

The study was guided by a project steering committee (HESPA-SC) consisting of the appointed co-chairs of the Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis Task Force (HESPA-TF), James McKenzie and Dixie Dennis; the chief staff officers of SOPHE and NCHEC, M. Elaine Auld and Linda Lysoby; and the Health Education Job Analysis–2010 task force chair, Eva Doyle. HESPA–2015 was conducted with the assistance of the Professional Examination Service (ProExam) of New York.

The Executive Summary of the study includes seven recommendations to the health education profession regarding the use of the HESPA–2015 hierarchical model for Health Education Specialists. The Executive Summary can be accessed on the NCHEC Website http://www.nchec.org. Findings from the HESPA–2015 report will be available in A Competency-Based Framework for Health Education Specialist publication available in the second quarter of 2015.

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Founded in 1988, the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc. (NCHEC) enhances the professional practice of Health Education by promoting and sustaining a credentialed body of Health Education Specialists. Therefore the purpose of NCHEC is to certify health education specialists, promote professional development, strengthen professional preparation and practice, and support and promote the health education profession. (See www.nchec.org).

Founded in 1950, the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) provides global leadership to the profession of health education and health promotion and promotes the health of society through advances in health education theory and research; excellence in professional preparation and practice; advocacy for public policies conducive to health; and the achievement of health equity for all. (www.sophe.org).