

Comparison of Two Different Professions:



This document aims to clarify the scope of practice, education, and credentialing of health and wellness coaches and holistic nutrition professionals. While there is some commonality in the scope of practice for health coaches and holistic nutrition professionals (HNPs), it is limited to motivational interviewing techniques (MIT). Holistic nutrition professionals gain extensive clinical education and knowledge that broadens their Scope of Practice beyond the limitations of health coaching.



What is a Health and Wellness Coach?

The International Consortium for Health and Wellness Coaching (ICHWC) now known as the National Board of Health and Wellness Coaching (NBHWC) states that *“health and wellness coaches partner with clients seeking self-directed, lasting changes, aligned with their values, which promote health and wellness and, thereby, enhance well-being. In the course of their work health and wellness coaches display unconditional positive regard for their clients and a belief in their capacity for change and honoring that each client is an expert on his or her life, while ensuring that all interactions are respectful and non-judgmental.”*



What is a Holistic Nutrition Professional?

The philosophy of holistic nutrition is that one's health is an expression of the complex interplay between the physical and chemical, mental and emotional, as well as spiritual and environmental aspects of one's life and being. Professionals who are trained in holistic nutrition view health and healing from a whole-person perspective. Using education as a primary tool, holistic nutrition professionals emphasize the building of health by approaching each person as a unique individual. This requires fully engaging the individual in his/her health recovery process and honoring his/her innate wisdom by working in an empowering and cooperative manner to chart a course to optimal health.



Health & Wellness Coach Scope of Practice

Health and wellness coaches work with individuals and groups in a client-centered process to facilitate and empower the client in developing self-management strategies to make healthy lifestyle and behavioral changes. The NBHWC states “While health and wellness coaches per se do not diagnose conditions, prescribe treatments, or provide psychological therapeutic interventions, they may provide expert guidance in areas in which they hold active, nationally recognized credentials, and may offer resources from nationally recognized authorities such as those referenced in NBHWC’s healthy lifestyle curriculum.” As partners and facilitators, health and wellness coaches support their clients in achieving health goals and behavioral change based on their clients’ own goals and consistent with treatment plans as prescribed by individual clients’ professional health care providers.

Holistic Nutrition Professionals Scope of Practice

A holistic nutrition professional advises individuals, families and groups on how to improve diet, lifestyle and attitude to promote optimal health. They may work with a licensed health care provider to help individuals with previously diagnosed illnesses identify biochemical imbalances and toxicities that contribute to poor health. Their advice and support are founded on evidence-based and holistic principles that promote active lifestyles and teach healthy eating.



Curriculum of a Health Coach

Health and wellness coaching schools/ programs have varied curricula; their focus is teaching students to coach clients to achieve behavioral change. For example, the National Society of Health Coaches (NSHC) which is not affiliated with the NBHWC provides an 85-hour self-directed course of study, the outline of their program follows:

- Introduction to Evidence-based Health Coaching
- Identifying Your Communication Style
- Are You Listening?
- Tapping into the Client's Learning Style
- Facilitating Health Behavior Change
- Guiding the Health Coaching Agenda & Goal Setting
- Motivational Interviewing
- Positive Psychology
- Wellness and Prevention
- Evidenced-based Practice Interventions for Chronic Conditions
- Measuring Health Coaching Outcome
- Putting it All Together!



Curriculum of a Holistic Nutrition Professional

While holistic nutrition education programs also have varied curricula, NANP-approved programs adhere to the following educational standards (a minimum of 1,080 hours):

24 TOTAL PROGRAM CREDITS (1 SEMESTER CREDIT=45 EDUCATIONAL HOURS)

1. Anatomy/Physiology - 3 semester credits
2. Biochemistry - 3 semester credits
3. Nutrition - 6 semester credits, must include:
 - a. Macronutrients
 - b. Micronutrients
 - c. Life Cycle Nutrition:
 1. Men's health (pediatric & geriatric)
 2. Women's health (pediatric & geriatric)
 - d. Sports Nutrition
4. Nutrition & Pathophysiology - 3 semester credits, topics to be covered below (may overlap with Physiology requirements above):
 - a. Nutritional Support of the Body (Digestive, Immune, Cardiovascular, Musculoskeletal, Nervous, Lymphatic, Integumentary)
 - b. Environmental Influences on Health & Disease
 - c. Symptomology of insufficiency, excess and impaired metabolism
5. Nutritional Counseling - 6 semester credits, to include:
 - a. Comparative Dietary Systems
 - b. Diet analysis & planning
 - c. Popular diets review
 - d. Whole foods
 - e. Cultural influences
 - f. Nutritional Supplementation
 - g. Health assessments
 - h. Analyzing laboratory results
 - i. Whole foods cooking
 - j. Menu/meal planning
6. Herbology - 1 semester credits, at least 30 herbs studied
7. Business - 1 semester credit, to include:
 - a. Legal issues surrounding nutrition practice
 - b. Practice Development
 - c. Ethics - Standard of Care and Scope of Practice
 - d. Bioethics (including FERPA & HIPAA)
8. Research - 1 semester credit

The Health & Wellness Coach Certifying Exam

There are two credentialing bodies for Health and Wellness Coaches and their philosophies differ as it pertains to scope of practice. The National Society of Health Coaches (NSHC) has specific eligibility criteria for its Health Coach Certification; that which requires a current license, registration or certification to assess, plan, treat, implement and/or evaluate interventions in clinical and wellness settings. Under the NSHC Scope of Practice only licensed/credentialed clinicians and practitioners may coach those with chronic conditions, co-morbidities, and those with high to moderate health risks. NSHC's program of study and credentialing exam is based on this premise and differentiates its Health Coach Certification from the NBHWC.

The National Board for Health and Wellness Coaching (NBHWC) has teamed with the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME) to implement standards for certification of Health and Wellness Coaches. They do not differentiate between Health and Wellness Coaches; the structure of their exam appears below.

Content Categories for the NBHWC Board Exam

The following topics are included in the assessment, and the weight/percentage of the questions appear below each topic:

17-23%
COACHING STRUCTURE

47-53%
COACHING PROCESS:
COACHING RELATIONSHIP/
COMMUNICATION/TECHNIQUES

17-23%
HEALTH & WELLNESS

7-13%
ETHICS/LEGAL (INCLUDING
CODE OF ETHICS)

Sample Questions from the NBHWC Exam

1. A 26-year-old man comes to the coach's office for his ninth weekly session. He was diagnosed with metabolic syndrome 7 months ago. He has been working earnestly on his 22 goal to decrease his BMI from 32kg/m to less than 27kg/m. He made steady progress in the first 7 weeks, but his weight has plateaued during the past 2 weeks. The client decided to further decrease his caloric intake by 200 calories daily. When the coach assesses the client's confidence about decreasing his caloric intake this week, using a 10-point scale, in which 0 is "not at all confident" and 10 is "extremely confident," the client rates his confidence as a 6. Which of the following is the most appropriate next step by the coach?
 - A. Brainstorm alternative actions for the client to achieve continued weight loss
 - B. Explore with the client what it would take to increase his confidence
 - C. Inquire about the client's accountability plan
 - D. Inquire if the client has the resources needed to meet his goal
 - E. Trust that the client is confident enough to meet his goal
2. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which of the following is the most common preventable cause of death in the United States?
 - A. Alcohol use
 - B. Firearm-related incidents
 - C. Illicit drug use
 - D. Obesity
 - E. Tobacco use
3. A 50-year-old man speaks with the coach on the phone for his eighth weekly session. His goal is to do aerobic activity for 30 minutes five times weekly. The client mentions that his son is always reminding him to get up off of the couch and exercise, which annoys the client. To reframe the client's perception, which of the following is the most appropriate response by the coach?
 - A. "You do not like it when your son nags you."
 - B. "You want to be more active than you currently are."
 - C. "Your plan was to get 150 minutes of aerobic activity each week."
 - D. "Your son seems to care about your health."
 - E. "Your son sounds like a broken record."

NANP's Board Exam in Holistic Nutrition with Oversight by the Holistic Nutrition Credentialing Board (HNCB)

It is the mission of the HNCB to provide knowledge-based examination and credentialing services to holistic nutrition professionals, thereby promoting a nationally recognized, responsible, and credible body of holistically educated nutrition professionals who serve as the primary holistic and functional nutrition resource for consumers, health care professionals, and the media. Distinct from but working in an integrative fashion with the allopathic medical community, HNCB certified professionals work to advance the paradigm for creating health by adhering to a holistic perspective and empowerment model of nutrition education and consulting. National board certification is a responsible step toward building consumer confidence and gaining wider acceptance among other credentialed health professionals.

Content Categories for the HNCB Board Exam

The following topics are included in the Board Exam, and the weight/percentage of the questions appear below each Domain:

35%

DOMAIN I: FOOD & NUTRITION

15%

DOMAIN II: FUNDAMENTALS OF ANATOMY, PHYSIOLOGY, & BIOCHEMISTRY

10%

DOMAIN III: NUTRITION COUNSELING SKILLS

30%

DOMAIN IV: NUTRITION IN PRACTICE

10%

DOMAIN V: RESEARCH

Sample Questions from the Board Exam in Holistic Nutrition

1. A client seeks to obtain his vitamins and minerals through a whole foods diet. Which food is a rich source of calcium?
 - A. collard greens
 - B. raspberries
 - C. kiwi
 - D. black beans
2. Cholesterol:
 - A. slows down fat absorption in the small intestine
 - B. initiates catabolism of osteocytes
 - C. is used to synthesize steroid hormones
 - D. increases the rate of liver detoxification
3. One of the challenges of nutrition consulting is recognizing the boundaries between nutrition counseling and psychotherapy. Which one of the following is an appropriate response when a client begins talking about serious psychological issues?
 - A. listen respectfully and change the topic as soon as appropriate
 - B. listen attentively, acknowledge the client's feelings, and offer practical advice
 - C. inform the client that such issues are beyond your scope of practice and suggest she see a therapist qualified to deal with her problem
 - D. deal with the issue by providing nutrition information related to the problem and give examples of how it has helped other clients with similar problems



Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) Codes for Health and Wellness Coaches

The following excerpts were taken from the October 15, 2019 Press Release. A link to the full press release is included for your review.

The NBHWC, a nonprofit affiliate of the National Board of Medical Examiners (NBME), announced the American Medical Association's (AMA) approval of new Category III Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®) Codes for health and well-being coaching effective January 1, 2020.

NBHWC and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) successfully applied for the creation of these new tracking codes, utilizing the NBHWC standards. VA will be tracking the use of the coaching codes to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching as a part of the Department's whole health system of care. This data could support Category I approval.

Professionals certified by NBHWC or NCHC (The National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc.) can use the new codes. Over the next few months, NBHWC and NCHC will develop guidelines on use of the new codes for National Board Certified Health and Wellness Coaches (NBC-HWCs), Certified Health Education Specialists (CHES®) and Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES®), physicians and other healthcare providers, healthcare systems, and payers.

NOTE: Reimbursement by payers of Category III codes is optional starting January 1, 2020. Payers typically wait until codes have Category I approval to begin paying.

The Category III Health and Well-Being Coaching Codes include:

- 0591T Health and Well-Being Coaching face-to-face; individual, initial assessment
- 0592T individual, follow-up session, at least 30 minutes
- 0593T group (two or more individuals), at least 30 minutes

<https://www.24-7pressrelease.com/press-release/466893/american-medical-association-approves-new-category-iii-cpt-codes-for-coaching>

Impact of Category III CPT Codes for the Holistic Nutrition Professional?

The American Medical Association (AMA) developed Category III CPT codes to track the utilization of emerging technologies, services, and procedures. The Category III CPT code does not establish a service or procedure as safe, effective or applicable to the clinical practice of medicine. Most insurance providers deem Category III codes as an item, service, or procedure not proven effective; therefore, the codes will be denied for lack of medical necessity.

The potential impact to Holistic Nutrition Professionals is expected to be minimal, as submitting such claims to insurers will most likely result in denial of payment. Follow up with insurance providers is time-consuming and requires a level of expertise most HNPs do not possess, resulting in a potentially greater expenditure of effort than the possible reimbursement would yield.

Conclusion

Holistic nutrition professionals have advanced clinical education that enables them to make evidence-based health and wellbeing recommendations, coupled with health coaching skills that support and enhance client compliance. Their education is science-based, focusing on bio-individuality, the science of food, nutrient composition, anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry. HNPs are well versed in researching, critical thinking, and building client counselor relationships.

Health coaching is a tool used by holistic nutrition professionals for imparting sound clinical knowledge that improve client outcomes. Health and wellness coaches who enter this realm without the requisite clinical education are working outside of their scope of practice.