



Sleep Psychology Recognized by APA as a Specialty in Professional Psychology

Recognition of sleep psychology by the American Psychological Association is an important step forward for the field of behavioral sleep medicine.

DARIEN, IL – A petition from the Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine for sleep psychology to be recognized as a specialty was approved by the American Psychological Association's Council of Representatives at the 121st Annual Convention of the APA, which was held July 31 to Aug. 4 in Honolulu, Hawaii.

According to SBSM President Michael T. Smith, PhD, the formal recognition of sleep psychology as a specialty in professional psychology is a testament to the growth and maturation of behavioral sleep medicine, and it marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the field.

"Achieving this important milestone in our development is only the first step in realizing the full potential that behavioral sleep medicine brings to the broader field of sleep," Smith said. "Specialty status will increase public and professional awareness of the valuable services provided by behavioral sleep medicine clinicians for patients with sleep disorders, and it will facilitate advocacy for broader coverage of these cognitive and behavioral services in health care delivery systems by third-party payers."

The development and submission of a petition to the APA's Commission for the Recognition of Specialties and Proficiencies in Professional Psychology was a two-year process coordinated by a presidential task force led by SBSM Past President Christina McCrae, PhD. The petition demonstrated that sleep psychology is grounded in a unique and substantially advanced scientific and theoretical body of knowledge. The task force also provided evidence showing that the field has a critical mass of highly skilled clinical providers, a national network of training opportunities that provide an organized sequence of education, and multiple high quality mechanisms to disseminate scientific knowledge.

"I congratulate Dr. McCrae and the other task force members on a tremendous job well done," said Smith. "Achieving approval is a testament to the strength of our field and the task force's dedication and hard work."

Sleep psychology addresses behavioral, psychological and physiological factors underlying normal and disordered sleep across the lifespan. Sleep psychologists develop, test and apply evidence-based behavioral and psychological approaches to the prevention and treatment of sleep disorders such as insomnia and co-existing conditions such as depression, chronic pain and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Smith added that one of the next steps for sleep psychologists will be to develop an American Board of Professional Psychology examination. Currently, a certification examination in behavioral sleep medicine is offered by the American Board of Sleep Medicine. However, a credential from the ABPP is increasingly required for psychologists working in medical settings.

Smith also noted that while sleep psychology is founded on basic psychological principles, the field of behavioral sleep medicine includes practitioners in other disciplines such as nursing and clinical social work. He hopes that the recognition of sleep psychology will lay the groundwork for the similar recognition of behavioral sleep medicine in other health professions.

"Behavioral sleep medicine is an interdisciplinary field, and sleep psychology is just one professional discipline within it," he said. "SBSM is committed to promoting all of the disciplines within the field to ensure that the unique contributions of each profession are fully realized."

About the SBSM

Established in 2010, the Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine is a membership society for professionals with an interest in behavioral and psychological approaches to the prevention and treatment of sleep disorders. The SBSM accredits fellowship training programs in behavioral sleep medicine, provides opportunities for professional education, and unites psychologists, physicians, nurses, clinical social workers and other health care professionals who are passionate about improving public health by promoting healthy sleep. More information, including a directory of behavioral sleep medicine providers, is available at www.behavioralsleep.org.