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**SUBJECT: OMNIBUS GUIDELINES IN THE ACCREDITATION OF
MARRIAGE COUNSELORS**

I. Rationale:

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) through its Standards Bureau issued Administrative Order No. 12 "Revised Guidelines in the Accreditation of Marriage Counselors" in 2007. The issuance is in compliance with the provision of the Family Code of the Philippines to promote the professional practice of marriage counselors as experts in assisting couples to decide on positive options in their marital relationships based on informed decision to achieve a stable and functional family relationship.

The DSWD, Commission on Population (POPCOM), Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) require the organization of inter-agency Pre Marriage Counseling (PMC) Teams whose members come from those agencies based in every cities and municipalities in a Joint Memorandum Circular No. 1 issued in 2002 "Revised Pre-Marriage Counseling Implementing Guidelines". After two years of implementing the A.O. No. 12 series of 2007, there are still some issues and concerns raised by members of the PMC teams from the cities and municipalities regarding the educational qualifications of members of the PMC especially the midwives who are graduates of a two (2) year course and other religious lay ministers, church pastors who conduct marriage counseling services.

II. Legal Bases

- A. Executive Order (EO) No. 15 series of 1998, as amended by EO 221 series of 2003 entitled Redirecting the Functions and Operations of the DSWD.

Section 3, (a) set standards, accredit, and provide consultative services to institutions, organizations and persons engaged in social welfare activities and monitor performance of institutions and persons engaged in social welfare activities, both public and private.

- B. Family Code of the Philippines

Article 16, "In cases where parental consent or advise is needed, the party or parties concerned shall, in addition to the requirements of the preceding articles, attach a certificate issued by a priest, imam, or minister authorized to solemnize marriage under Article 7 of the Family Code of the Philippines or a marriage counselor duly accredited by proper government agency to the effect that the contracting parties have undergone marriage counseling". The Civil Code Revision Committee, UP Law Center in its letter dated September 23, 1988 to the National

Statistics Office clarified this provision that the DSWD is the proper government agency to accredit marriage counselors.

- C. Joint Memorandum Circular No. 01 series of 2002 (DSWD, DILG, DOH and POPCOM) III. Roles of National Coordinating Agencies, letter D - DSWD, shall provide technical assistance to Local Government Units (LGUs) on Marriage Counseling and Accredited Marriage Counselors.

III. Definition of Terms

- A. **Marriage Counseling Service (MCS)** - refers to the professional way of guiding or assisting couples through any of the following: a) being informed and responsible in deciding about contracting marriage b) enriching their marital relationship c) helping resolve marital conflict and d) to arrive at a decision for the best interests of their children and each other if they filed a petition for legal separation. It is implemented through the following interventions:
1. **Pre-Marriage Counseling (PMC)** – refers to providing would-be-couples with a basis for making an informed and responsible decision about marriage.
 2. **Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC)** – refers to helping married couples to:
 - 2.1 Renew and enhance their marital relationship and intimacy;
 - 2.2 Deepen their marital morality and spirituality.
 3. **Marriage Crisis Counseling (MCC)** – refers to helping married couples to:
 - 3.1 Experience the process of emotional and psychological healing;
 - 3.2 Gain an objective perspective of their marital situation;
 - 3.3 Identify areas for behavioral change and improvement;
 - 3.4 Identify strengths and areas of reinforcement;
 - 3.5 Acquire and apply techniques for effective communication and conflict resolution; and
 - 3.6 Acquire and apply information on marital growth.
 4. **Trial Separation Counseling (TSC)** refers to:
 - 4.1 Motivating the couple in making a final effort of reconciliation; and
 - 4.2 Accompanying them through a process of psycho-spiritual discernment.
 5. **Pre-Marriage Counselor** – refers to a social worker and other trained professional authorized by the local chief executive to conduct Pre-Marriage Counseling sessions to would be couples applying for marriage license.
 6. **Full Fledged Marriage Counselor** - refers to a social worker and other professional who is trained in Marriage Counseling Service and implements interventions that includes Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC), Marital Crisis Counseling (MCC) and Trial Separation Counseling (TSC) aside from Pre Marriage Counseling (PMC).

7. **Accreditation** – refers to the recognition bestowed by the DSWD to an individual's expertise to provide MCS as evidenced by a Certificate of Accreditation.

IV. General Policies

This general policy is included to provide all concerned agencies guide and directions to accomplish the objectives of AO 12 series of 2007.

- A. All DSWD Field Offices (FOs) must advocate to all local government units (LGUs) the organization/establishment of Pre Marriage Counseling Team through the issuance of a Sangguniang Bayan/Panglunsod resolution.
- B. DSWD FO shall advocate to all LGUs through the Provincial/City/Municipal Social Welfare and Development Offices (P/C/MSWDOs) to include in their Annual Work and Financial Plan the budget for the capability building activities of their staff specifically attendance to trainings related to marriage counseling (MC).
- C. Either half or whole day shall be allotted for purposes of accreditation assessment on PMC by all the members of the PMC team in a designated venue. This arrangement must be suggested and recommended by the Standards Bureau in their communication with the local chief executive of the city/municipality.
- D. Pre Marriage Counseling team are expected to discuss the assigned topics in the Marriage Counseling Service Manual. In cases there is more than one applicant, only two per agency will be allowed to share in the discussion of each topic. The Pre Marriage Counseling Orientation/Manual shall be developed by the POPCOM together with DSWD and DOH.
- E. The certificate of accreditation issued to an individual marriage counselor is non-transferable.
- F. All members of the city/municipal PMC team are required to apply for accreditation with the concerned DSWD FO.
- G. Only an accredited PMC Team member is authorized to sign the PMC certificate.

V. Composition of Pre Marriage Counseling (PMC) Team

The Pre Marriage Counseling Team shall be composed of a minimum of three (3) and a maximum of five (5) members from the following City and Municipality depending on their availability:

- A. Primary Members (Mandatory)
 1. Municipal/ City Social Welfare Development Officer
 2. Municipal/ City Health Officer
 3. Population Commission Officer

B Secondary Members (Optional)

1. Nutrition Officer
2. Municipal/City Agricultural Officer;
3. Education; and
4. NGOs/Religious Groups

VI. Coverage of the Accreditation Service

The accreditation of marriage counselors covers all trained social workers and other professionals providing marriage counseling services.

VII. Qualification of Pre-Marriage and Marriage Counselors

- A. Must have a Bachelors Degree in Social Work or other behavioral and social science courses or have at least finished a two (2) year diploma course on midwifery or other allied courses.
- B. Must have been conducting Pre Marriage Counseling for the last two (2) years as member of the Municipality/City PMC team
- C. Must have attended at least twenty four (24) hours of training on Marriage Counseling Service conducted by the DSWD or its recognized training institutions.
- D. Must be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills in conducting marriage counseling such as but not limited to teaching, interviewing, facilitating, documenting and networking/coordinating.

VIII. Requirements for Accreditation

Applicants for accreditation must submit a duly accomplished application form together with the following documents in two (2) photocopies (original copies must be presented):

A. Pre Marriage Counselor

1. For New Applicant

- 1.1 Certificate of graduation/college diploma or transcript of records from the last school attended.
- 1.2 Certificate of attendance from PMC orientation program. If unavailable, a certified true copy of the certificate of participation/attendance from the training provider will be accepted.
- 1.3 Certification from immediate supervisor that the applicant is tasked to conduct PMC sessions.
- 1.4 Documentation of PMC session/s conducted by the applicant in the past six (6) months period should be made available.

2. For Renewal of Accreditation

- 2.1 Certificates of attendance to at least eight (8) hours training every year (24 hours training in three years) on topics such as but not limited to Human Maturity, Value Clarification, Authentic Love, Responsible Parenting and Gender Development.
- 2.2 Accomplishment reports for the past three (3) years preceding the application.
- 2.3 Sample of summary documentation of PMC session/s conducted.
- 2.4 Other documents to be made available during validation visit.
 - Compilation of client's intake forms;
 - Accomplished Marriage Expectation Inventory;
 - Documentation of the pre-marriage counseling sessions conducted within the three (3) years period; and
 - Summary documentation of pre-marriage counseling sessions conducted within three (3) years period.

B. Full Fledged Marriage Counselor

1. For New Applicant

- 1.1 First two (2) requirements stated under Pre Marriage Counselor new applicant.
- 1.2 Training certificates or Certificate of Attendance to marriage counseling/counseling interventions (Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC), Marital Crisis Counseling (MCC), Trial Separation Counseling (TSC) conducted by DSWD or other DSWD recognized training institutions.
- 1.3 Sample of summary documentation of marriage counseling sessions for couples encountering marital issue on the following:
 - At least two (2) Marriage Enrichment Counseling (MEC) cases handled within the year;
 - At least two (2) Marital Crisis Counseling (MCC) every year; and
 - At least two (2) Trial Separation Counseling (TSC) cases every year.

2. For Renewal of Accreditation

- 2.1 Certificate of attendance to at least eight (8) hours training every year or (24 hours training in three years) on topics related to Marriage Counseling.
- 2.2 Other documentation to be made available during validation visit:
 - Documentation of counseling sessions (PMC, MEC, MCC and TSP);

- Accomplishment report of the preceding year;
- Registry Book containing the names of couples served, date of interventions, number of MC sessions, other services provided and signature of couples;
- Accomplished intake forms which provide the profile of the counselee;
- Accomplished marriage expectation inventory (MEI) which provides information on the values perspective of applicant on marriage and family life;
- Marriage counseling sessions should indicate issues and concerns raised during session; and
- Referral letters from the Local Civil Registrar (LCR) and the court for couples who filed petition for legal separation.

IX. Validity period of the accreditation

The accreditation certificate issued to a marriage counselor has a validity period of three (3) years and will be renewed after expiration to submit updated requirements.

X. Accreditation Process

A. Pre-Assessment

1. The DSWD-FO staff meets with the C/MSWD Officer and other professionals conducting Pre-Marriage Counseling to would-be-couples and Marriage Counseling to married couples and encourages them to apply for accreditation as Pre Marriage Counselor or as Full Fledged Marriage Counselor. The DSWD-FO staff shall provide them the list of requirements to be submitted to the DSWD FO.
2. The MC applicants file their application for accreditation as Pre-Marriage Counselor or Full Fledged Marriage Counselor to the concerned DSWD FO with photocopies of all the documentary requirements as mentioned. Original copies of documents submitted shall be presented to the FO staff for verification/pre- assessment purposes.
3. Once verified, the assigned DSWD-FO staff acknowledges receipt of application with the photocopy of each supporting document, within three (3) working days from the date of the application. These shall be endorsed with the corresponding pre-assessment result of the DSWD FO concerned to the DSWD Standards Bureau (SB) as reference for the final review during the on site accreditation assessment. DSWD-SB shall acknowledge receipt/comment after the endorsement made by the concerned DSWD FO. The concerned DSWD FO shall keep a file copy of all documents submitted for future reference and verification purposes.

B. Validation Proper

1. When the service providers confirms their availability on the proposed date, the DSWD SB technical staff shall conduct an on site accreditation assessment in coordination with the DSWD-FO Staff.
2. During the validation assessment visit, the DSWD SB technical staff makes a courtesy call to the Local Chief Executive or his/her authorized representative with the presence of the City/MSWD Officer. The DSWD-SB technical staff discusses the provisions of this guideline and the detailed activities to be conducted in relation to the accreditation assessment of the applicants for PMC or Full Fledged Marriage Counselor.
3. Within ten working days after the on site accreditation assessment, the DSWD-SB shall send a confirmation report to the concerned DSWD FO. The DSWD FO will in turn inform the C/MSWDO applicant on the result of the accreditation assessment.
4. In cases where the assessment falls below the standards, the said applicants shall be given appropriate technical assistance on specific areas needing improvement and a re-assessment shall be conducted six (6) months thereafter.

C. Issuance of Accreditation Certificate and Identification Card (ID).

Based on the types of accreditation applied for, corresponding certificate of accreditation and ID shall be issued by the DSWD-SB through the concerned DSWD-FO within fifteen (15) working days after the on-site accreditation assessment.

D. Renewal of Accreditation and Identification Card

Accreditation certificate and ID as Pre Marriage Counselor/Full Fledged Marriage Counselor shall re renewed every three (3) years. Application for renewal shall be filed two (2) months before the expiration of the issued certificate and ID.

XI. Capability Building And Training

To ensure continuous and effective implementation of Pre Marriage-Counseling, the DILG shall facilitate the conduct of PMC training to all local government employees identified as members of the PMC team. Resource persons of the training will be provided by the national agencies represented in the LGUs.

XII. Benefits Of An Accredited Marriage Counselor (MC)

- A. An Accredited Marriage Counselors shall be a priority for:
 1. Continuing technical assistance to include attendance to lecture series, seminars workshops and other forms of capability building;
 2. Consultation meeting/s, program development, policy formulation and other related activities of the Department; and

3. Inclusion in the list of professionals for scholarships, fellowships, and postgraduate studies in regional, national and foreign level courses or training relative to marriage counseling.
- B. Inclusion of name in the Directory of Accredited Service Providers in the DSWD website.
 - C. Recognition/appreciation for having been accredited during flag ceremony at DSWD FOs/LGUs.
 - D. Access to reading/informative materials on family trends and issues available at the Local Social Welfare and Development Office and DSWD FOs.

XIII. Institutional Arrangements

- A. Social Welfare and Institutional Development Bureau (SWIDB)
 1. Provide DSWD-FOs a list of DSWD recognized training institutions providing trainings/seminar on marriage counseling;
 2. Conduct of trainer's training; and
 3. Ensure continuity of training programs along marriage counseling to further enhance the competence of service providers.
- B Standards Bureau
 1. Provide technical assistance to DSWD-FOs on the interpretation of the guidelines and requirements for accreditation;
 2. Assess applicants for accreditation;
 3. Ensure nationwide dissemination of the guidelines and compliance of SWDAs;
 4. Maintain an updated inventory of accredited and not accredited PMCs and MCs to facilitate monitoring of compliance and provision of technical assistance;
 5. Issue ID card and Accreditation Certificates;
 6. Coordinate with the Civil Registrar's Office for the issuance of corresponding Marriage Certificate (MC) to the Local Civil Registrar's office re: marriage license to be issued only to those would-be-couple with PMC certificate signed by accredited PMCs/MCs; and
 7. Posting the list of accredited PMCs and MCs at the DSWD websites.
- C Program Management Bureau
 - 1 Provide technical assistance to DSWD-FOs on the implementation of MC Service; and

- 2 Provision of reading/informative materials on family trends and issues to accredited MCs.

D Field Offices

1. Ensure compliance of involved service providers to existing guidelines;
2. Intensify conduct of advocacy through regular orientation/consultation and dialogue to promote the guidelines especially at LGU and NGO level. Bi-annual reports on these activities shall be submitted to the Standards Bureau;
3. Coordinate with LGUs re: strategies that will encourage compliance and effective implementation of MCs e.g a resolution allocating percentage from the annual income gathered from marriage license fees as additional monetary incentives/benefits to accredited MCs in a particular city/municipality;
4. Conduct of pre-accreditation assessment and filing of copies of all documents submitted by the applicants for reference purposes;
5. Conduct of training for LGU/NGO workers directly involved in the implementation of MCs;
6. Conduct regular meeting with accredited PMCs/MCs for updates on newly enacted laws, policies/guidelines and issues affecting families, among others. This will also be a venue for exchange of information and experiences on marriage counseling;
7. Assist in the training of LGU PMC Team per Joint MC no 1 s. 2002;
8. Provide LGUs a list of accredited PMCs/MCs with in their areas of jurisdiction; and
9. Submit to the DSWD-SB an update inventory of accredited and not accredited PMCs/MCs.

XIV. Decentralization Of Accreditation Of Marriage Counselors

The accreditation of pre-marriage and marriage counselors shall be decentralized to the DSWD – FO one (1) year after the effectivity of this guideline.

- A. The DSWD–SB in partnership with SWIDB shall conduct intensive training to DSWD-FO personnel on the following:
 1. Pre-Marriage Counseling Orientation/Manual developed by DSWD and DOH.
 2. Marriage counseling laws, policies, guidelines.
 3. Process and administration of accreditation assessment tool.
- B. After the training, pilot testing of the accreditation of pre-marriage counselors/marriage counselors shall be conducted in four (4) regions with the

most number of PMC service provider in the last six (6) months. Thereafter, other remaining regions will follow until the accreditation has been decentralized to FOs.

C. During the pilot testing period, the FOs are tasked to do the following:

1. Review and study the provisions of AO 12 series 2007 "the Revised Guidelines in the Accreditation of Marriage Counselors" and the Accreditation Assessment Tools.
2. Familiarize themselves with the Pre Marriage Counseling Orientation/Manual.
3. Conduct actual observation of PMC sessions and review the reportorial requirements in the LGUs.
4. Conduct of a joint assessment between the DSWD-SB technical staff and staff of the Standards Unit of the DSWD-FO on the session on PMC applicant. The joint assessment conducted must be supported by an assessment report and accomplish assessment tool to be submitted to the SB Director and a copy furnished to the FO Director.
5. DSWD-SB technical staff must provide continuous technical assistance to the DSWD-FO counterpart to enhance their capability of conducting the assessment.

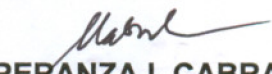
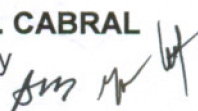
D. The DSWD SB shall issue the Accreditation Certificate to all PMC/marriage counselors who meet the standards during the pilot testing. However, the concerned DSWD FOs shall maintain a data bank of assessed and accredited PMC/MC.

One year after the effectivity of this guideline, the accreditation of Pre-Marriage and Marriage Counselors shall be turned-over to DSWD FOs.

XV. EFFECTIVITY

These guidelines shall take effect thirty (30) days following its publication in the Official Gazette.

Issued this 8th day of Dec 2009 at Quezon City Philippines.


ESPERANZA I. CABRAL
Secretary 

DSWD - OSEC



In Reply Please Cite: R0000016161