

# North Carolina Family Therapist



*Strengthening family, couple, and individual health*

## North Carolina Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

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P O Box 98073

Raleigh, NC 27624

Toll free 877-862-2638

Local 919-518-1919

cam@nc.rr.com

## From the President's Desk— Karen Caldwell, PhD, LMFT

Re-envisioning AAMFT:  
The Profession and the  
Practice



Our parent organization is engaged in a re-envisioning process. The question is, “What are we as an organization going to be in the future?” For thirty years, AAMFT has advocated for both the field and for its practitioners to be recognized by law. We’ve changed through the years, and the success of gaining MFT licensure in all 50 states has changed the nature of what AAMFT can and can’t do. AAMFT was initially the ethics watch-dog of the MFT profession and set standards for training for supervisors and MFT practitioners. Now, state regulatory boards have taken over the functions of ethics complaints hearings and setting supervision requirements. When I joined AAMFT in the late 1980s, AAMFT reviewed my coursework and supervision hours to determine if I could become a Clinical Member. Now, state boards determine who is qualified to be licensed as MFTs, and Clinical Membership is granted only to licensed MFTs. One of the questions raised in the current re-envisioning process is this: Must

AAMFT always be associated with the license even when it no longer has any stake or control in licensure? Are we promoting a field of therapy or a title?

The MFT field is built around the belief that systemic therapies use the resources of individuals and social groups to support positive change for people seeking help. We must continue to build a case for our treatment modalities; otherwise the profession (and we as practitioners) will become obsolete. We also must find ways to monitor legislation that seeks to undermine or limit our ability to practice.

Complexity characterizes the provision of mental health services at this point in time. As a result, MFT is a challenging profession and entering the field is not easy. We must make it possible for new professionals to enter the field or the MFT profession will no longer exist as a separate profession. When you receive surveys from AAMFT about the re-envisioning process, please respond. The direction we go in as an organization can have a major impact on what we as MFT professionals will do in the future.

## **NCAMFT Continuing Education: The Gift that Keeps on Giving Emma Wallace, LMFT**

CHANGE: Webster defines change as “something to be altered; to become different; to undergo variation; to be partially or wholly transformed; to diversify; any variation in form, state, quality, or essence; or a passing from one state or form to another.” And isn’t CHANGE what has been drilled into all of us from day one in grad school? CHANGE is what we try to promote in families and now we are facing this challenge ourselves!

NCMFT Licensure Board is requiring us to CHANGE. At the end of June of 2012, we will need to have acquired 20 hours of CE units instead of the previous 12. Frankly, I do not see that as unrealistic, as many other disciplines are required to have 20 or even more hours for licensure renewal. And education CHANGES us! Marriage and family therapy undergoes transformation as new paradigms and interventions are introduced and different ways of conceptualizing families are tried.

You will be asked to complete an online survey on the NCAMFT website identifying your preferences for the CHANGE in our annual conference that will be necessary in order to accommodate the additional 2 hours of CEU’s required by the Licensure Board. As it stands now, we offer 6 hours in pre-conference hours, and 6 hours each on Friday and Saturday, totaling 18 hours. Please take the time to complete the survey for it will help the NCAMFT Board in making the final decision regarding a new format for our annual conference in 2012. Our NCAMFT Board will meet and make the final decision regarding the new structure after we review your input. Thank you in advance for your help!

At our last Board meeting, I shared the highlights of your evaluations and suggestions with the rest of the Board members. We take seriously your concerns and will do what we can to honor your suggestions. Our budget determines what we can offer and we try to work within those limits to provide the best possible experiences. Thank you again for your candor and helpful remarks.

Don’t forget our 2011 conference with Richard Schwartz, Ph.D., LMFT on Feb. 24-26, 2011 in Concord, NC at the Embassy Suites. We have preliminary plans already in place for the 2012 conference, and will keep you informed as to when those plans are solid.

Have a safe and healthy summer!  
Emma Wallace, LMFT

**NCAMFT  
2011 Annual  
Conference  
Internal Family  
Systems  
Richard Schwartz, PhD  
February 24—26, 2011  
Embassy Suites  
Concord,  
North Carolina**

### **Free Member Ads (up to 35 words per ad)**

**Need last-minute CEUS for re-licensure?** The Mindful Ecotherapy Organization presents 6-hour evidence-based seminars on Mindfulness and the Family System. For more information or to register, visit [www.mindfulecotherapy.org](http://www.mindfulecotherapy.org), or email Charlton Hall, MMFT, LMFT at [chuck@mindfulecotherapy.org](mailto:chuck@mindfulecotherapy.org).

**Play Therapist** - Holistic practice in Davidson is seeking a licensed play therapist. Must carry own malpractice insurance. Credentialing with BlueCross BlueShield of NC preferred. Overhead costs are covered by practice. Call 704-655-2827.

# Introducing Liza Shaw, Our New Public Relations Committee Chair

by: Liza Shaw, MA, LMFT

I am joining the NCAMFT Board as Chairperson of the Public Relations Committee after Sandy Carawan resigned due to health concerns. I come to the Board with over eighteen years of education and experience in Public Relations and Communications and I am excited about the opportunity to serve the NCAMFT.

I have owned and marketed my private marriage and family therapy practice in the Boone and Hickory, NC, areas since earning my Master's degree in 1999. I gained most of my knowledge of marketing and public relations during my undergraduate studies in Communications at Syracuse University in New York. I also learned a great deal during my early career in the non-profit sector. I worked as the Community Relations Coordinator for Interact, Raleigh's domestic violence and rape crisis services, and served as the Communications Director for the YWCA of Wake County. My experience in these jobs provided me with a valuable knowledge base from which to draw, in marketing myself and my work as a marriage and family therapist. I have used this knowledge to develop relationships with media outlets, resulting in my serving as a guest columnist for various newspapers in New York State and North Carolina. I have landed interviews on radio talk shows (you can hear some of them on my online audio blog at [www.powertothriveradio.com](http://www.powertothriveradio.com)) and I have also been included as an expert in national magazine articles such as Psychology Today.

As public relations committee chair, I'm committed to spreading the word across the state that

MFTs are *The Relationship Experts*. I think it's time that the public understands this distinction before prospective clients go searching for someone to help them with their relationship problems. Too many couples show up in my office admitting that the reason it took them so long to get help for their marriage is that *everyone they know who sought marriage therapy is divorced now!* Most of them are appalled when I explain to them that even counselors with no specialized training, experience or supervision can provide marriage therapy. It is my goal to get the message out to the public at large that marriage and family therapy is a specialized discipline that is uniquely designed to focus on relationship systems.

I have proposed a plan to the Board which, among other things, includes developing an assortment of easy-to-use, customizable tools for members to increase publicity for themselves as practitioners, or for their therapy practices. I am also looking forward to bringing the NCAMFT into the existing national public relations campaign developed by the AAMFT. This campaign emphasizes the utilization of many of the current low-cost or free internet-based marketing vehicles. Participating in this campaign would involve transforming the current NCAMFT website into a state-of-the-art communication channel, targeting and funneling potential new clients, medical practitioners, legislators and the public at large.



The site could also provide a NCAMFT members-only section, which would allow clinical and associate members to participate in social and professional networking, job-related announcements, blogging, and other means of staying in

communication with one another. Joining the national PR campaign can also involve developing a more vigorous presence on some of the existing free social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

I hope to more vibrantly involve the NCAMFT in the digital-age of marketing and publicity. There are many excellent opportunities for clinicians to be seen and heard on the internet. And please don't worry if you don't know the first thing about any of this yet. I plan to offer members free tele-conference trainings, to bring them up to speed on what all this cyber-stuff is about.

To be most successful in my endeavors, I know I cannot do it all by myself. I'm hoping to add some seasoned marketing/publicity professionals to the public relations committee. If you are a member who has a good deal of experience with media, marketing or public relations, and you want to contribute your expertise to help the Association spread the message that marriage and family therapists are the relationship experts, please email me at [lizashaw@powertothrive.com](mailto:lizashaw@powertothrive.com).

# LMFT: The Greatest Mental Health Credential That No One Has Heard Of

by Tina Bertone Siragusa, LMFT

"I believe the greatest gift I can conceive of having from anyone is to be seen by them, heard by them, to be understood and touched by them. The greatest gift I can give is to see, hear, understand and to touch another person. When this is done I feel contact has been made."--Virginia Satir

I remind myself of this quote every time I begin a therapy session. The funny thing is that I didn't think it would pertain to my employment search in North Carolina, and that it would pertain to my status as an LMFT.

I earned my Master of Marriage and Family Therapy in 1986. I practiced in Connecticut for 15 years before moving to NC. I remember that at the time I earned my degree, there was a shift in the psychotherapy field in CT: a pull to make MSW the preferred credentialing. I was right on the edge of completing my degree, and considered going back to get the MSW to cover my bases. I decided that I was going to stay loyal to my belief in systems theory and stop at my associate certificate in Social Work. I figured that if I was ever going to go back to school for that extensive an amount of work then it might as well be for my PhD.

I moved to NC in 1994, and decided to take some time off to be a full time mother. I started back to work in 1999, added Expressive Arts credentialing and Substance Abuse licensing to my toolbox, and in 2004 began working toward my NC LMFT license. I had been working as a qualified mental health professional while getting what I needed for licensing status.

It is my about astonishment with what I encountered while job hunting that I write this article. I saw a listing for a position with a particular Local Management Entity (LME). It stated the qualifications for the position--"LCSW, LCAS, LPC"--as well as the instructions, "And please no calls." The job was not what I was looking for, but since I knew the director, I decided to call anyway and inquire. The director hadn't noticed that LMFT was not included, and said that, "of course an LMFT could apply. In fact, it is absurd that it is missing." I was told that a call was going to be placed to the state MHDDSA department to get this changed.

I followed up with a letter to the NCMFT Board to express my concern and dismay at what I had been

witnessing along the way. I have been doing this work for 20 years. How can this be so?

Sadly, it did not end with that employment announcement. I saw a position open at a local provider that is quite prominent in the Triangle. This ad, too, said, "no calls please." I applied and received a call from the director to inquire about my licensing. She stated that she had been working as an LCSW for 7 years and had never heard of the LMFT, and asked if I could please explain what it is. She was not sure they could interview me. She was still unsure after I explained, because, she said, her data input did not list LMFT credentialing, and she wasn't sure if they could be creative enough to enter it into their system. She also wanted to call Medicaid to see if I could bill under that license. You might think this occurred a while back, but this was recent. I know that there are programs in NC for the MFT. I know some graduates and several working in the field. So, how can this be?

I also know a couple of LMFT professionals that moved to NC from California and Florida, who opted for the LPC license because getting their LMFT in NC would mean more steps than the LPC. This too is concerning because that means that the LMFT discipline's strength and potential is being lost because of some technicalities. I do agree with keeping the license strong and valid, but why are we losing LMFTs to other licensing? People need work and do what they have to for their own welfare, but our body may be suffering as a result.

I am fortunate that I have been able to secure a good position along the way, but I am still concerned that the licensing is not "seen," as Virginia Satir would say, even in this day and age.

I was advised to add LPC to my credentialing to be in the group that appears to have legislative strength. It wouldn't be a difficult task. However, I would prefer to stay loyal to my systems approach. And so I ask all LMFT's, "How can we, as a body, be seen and gain strength as an entity in NC?"

*The views expressed here are the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of NCAMFT.*