



# Stand up. Stand out.

## BUSTED! Three big myths—and the truth—about social workers and board certification for health care case management

Increasingly, social workers are seeking board certification as case managers. Along with that interest come questions—about eligibility, career trajectory, exam costs, benefits and a host of other issues.

There are plenty of good answers out there—but there are also more than a few myths. Social workers interested in exploring health care case management as a career need to be able to separate fact from fiction. Jane Harkey, RN-BC, MSW, CCM, chair of the Commission for Case Manager Certification® (the Commission), and Veronica Brothers, BSN, RN, MSW, LGSW, CCM, of First Rehabilitation Resources, Inc., are uniquely equipped to help them do just that. Both are board-certified RN case managers who hold social work credentials, and they are ready to bust three big myths.

### **MYTH 1: You must be a nurse to work in health care case management and to be eligible for the CCM.**

**Reality:** Social workers have *always* been eligible to sit for the CCM® exam. The CCM is a cross-cutting certification that validates quality and ethical practice, whether the candidate comes from nursing, social

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work or an allied health field. Although most (89 percent) CCMs are registered nurses, that’s changing: Currently, 6 percent are social workers, and that percentage is rising.<sup>1</sup>

“Social workers have always been eligible to take the exam, but today we’re seeing greater interest,” says Harkey. (For details on other eligibility requirements, see page 5.)

Social work and case management have been aligned for more than a century. Public health social workers were among the first case managers, providing case management services in the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In the early 1970s, Medicaid and Medicare case management demonstration projects typically used social workers to coordinate and facilitate care.<sup>3</sup>

The National Association of Social Workers’ (NASW) 2004 benchmark study of licensed social workers found that case management was a component of most social workers’ jobs, and a significant number of social workers reported spending more than half their time engaged in it.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, social workers are a growing presence in the health care arena: Employment of health care social workers is projected to grow 19 percent from 2014 to 2024, according to census data.<sup>5</sup>

For Harkey and Brothers, it’s a natural alignment. Harkey’s undergraduate degree was in nursing. “As my career progressed, I found myself doing more counseling than hands-on health care,” she says. So when it was time to pursue an advanced degree, she opted for social work. “I never

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regretted that decision. The skill sets in social work helped enhance my case management abilities.”

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Brothers came to health care case management from the opposite direction: She had earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in social work. While working in corrections she saw how closely social workers and medical staff worked together. The former focused on behavioral health, the latter on physical, but “I realized the two were absolutely inseparable,” she says. That inspired her to return to school for a nursing degree.

This mind/body link highlights why both RN and social work case managers are crucial. Most adults

1 Health2 Resources and CCMC, *Professional and Demographic Characteristics of CCMs*. September 2015

2 Social Work & Care Coordination—a briefing paper from the National Association of Social Workers. <http://www.naswdc.org/advocacy/briefing/CareCoordinationBriefingPaper.pdf> (undated, but 2009 or later)

3 *The History of Case Management*, CMSA Detroit. <https://cmsadetroit.org/about-us/history-chapter/>

4 April 9, 2010 letter from NASW to CCMC.

5 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2016-17 Edition*, Social Workers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm>

## CCMC and NASW: a powerful partnership

An important agreement between the Commission for Case Manager Certification and the National Association of Social Workers, announced in June 2016, makes it easier for social workers to sit for the CCM exam.

Social workers who qualify for the NASW case management credential may also pre-qualify to take the CCMC certification exam at no additional fee. For its members, NASW will provide an additional discount. Here's how it works:

1. NASW members may apply for the appropriate NASW Case Management Credential, either:
  - a. Certified Social Work Case Manager (C-SWCM) (BSW Level); or
  - b. Certified Advanced Social Work Case Manager (C-ASWCM) (MSW Level)
2. Once approved, members are also eligible to sit for the CCM exam—at no additional cost.

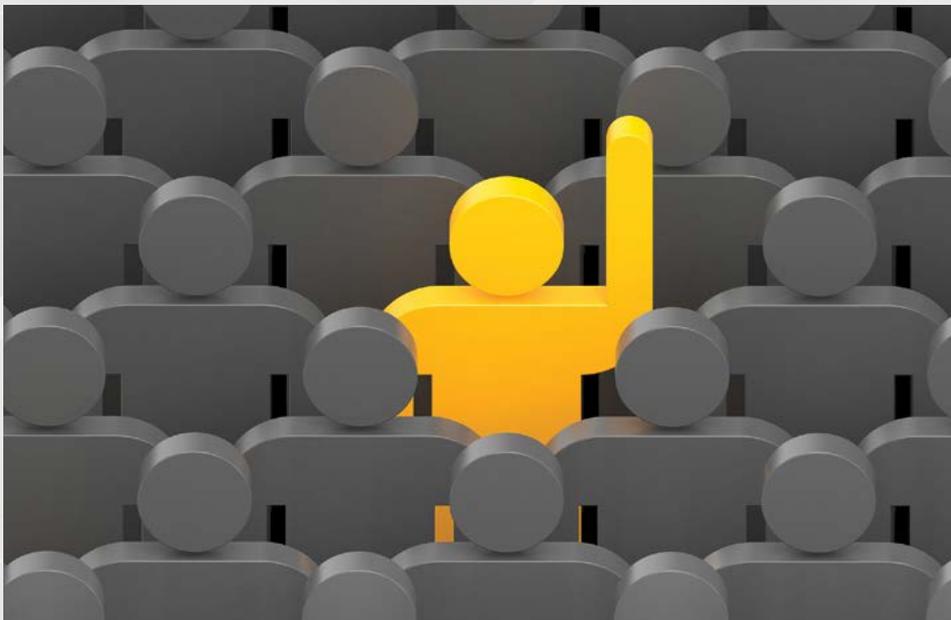
The CCMC-NASW collaboration—between the oldest and largest case manager certification body and the

oldest and largest social work membership organization—creates new opportunities for social workers to play an active role in hospitals, health plans, clinics and other health care settings, explains Lisa Yagoda, MSW, LICSW, senior practice associate, NASW.

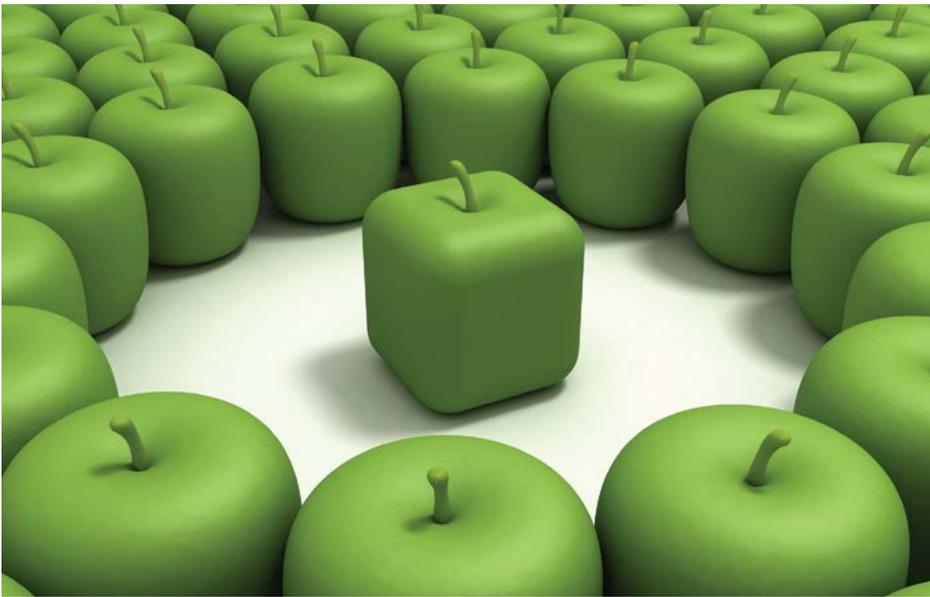
As the health care delivery system changes, the demand grows for social workers who are board-certified case managers. “We want to help social workers meet the needs of the changing workforce,” she adds.

In this changing environment, employers are increasingly demanding a credential. “Once you’ve achieved professional education, credentialing is the next step in professional growth and advancement. It demonstrates you have the necessary knowledge, expertise, skills and ability, and it reinforces your ability to work in a multidisciplinary environment,” she explains.

“That’s why we’ve entered this collaboration. We want to help social workers who want to elevate their professional profile do that through NASW and CCM certification.”



*For details, contact the NASW Credentialing Center at [Credentialing.nasw@socialworkers.org](mailto:Credentialing.nasw@socialworkers.org), 800-638-8799 ext. 447 or 202-408-8600 ext. 447*



***"Trust me. Case management is certainly not a 'cookie cutter' position."***

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with a behavioral health disorder have at least one medical condition, and about a third of those with a medical condition have a comorbid mental health condition.<sup>6</sup> Social workers are especially adept at motivational interviewing, communication and dealing with mental health concerns, says Harkey. Their expertise becomes critical, given the complex psychosocial issues affecting how well a patient follows a care plan, lifestyle-related medical conditions, caregiving deficits and lack of advance planning.

### **MYTH 2: Certification is expensive.**

**Reality:** The fees are modest: The application fee is \$200, and the exam is \$185. That's \$385. Certification lasts five years; amortized over that period, it comes to \$77 a year.

Many times, the case manager doesn't even have to pay: "Keep in mind that most employers will pay for the exam," Brothers notes. The most recent data from the Commission bears this out: Most board-certified case managers (63 percent) report that their employers

pay for the initial certification exam.<sup>7</sup> Expect the number and the percentage to grow, she adds.

The fee for the CCM exam is reimbursable under the Post-9/11 GI Bill; that means veterans *and* their families are eligible to take it and get reimbursed. The Commission also offers significant discounts to military and VA employees. In addition, social workers seeking the NASW case management credential can sit for the CCM exam at no additional fee. (For details, see page 6.)

### **MYTH 3: Case management is an entry level job that anyone can do; it's not for experienced social workers.**

**Reality:** It's a challenging senior-level job, and the pay reflects it.

The Commission's trend survey<sup>8</sup> busts this myth pretty easily. For example:

- 67 percent of CCMs have nine or more years in case management
- 25 percent supervise others
- 67 percent have specialty training

*CCM compensation also underscores that this is a job for experienced professionals: The median salary is now in the range*

6 The Synthesis Project, Policy Brief No. 21. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Mental disorders and medical comorbidity.

7 Health2 Resources and CCMC, *Professional and Demographic Characteristics of CCMs*, September 2015

8 Ibid

## Two myths about CCM eligibility

### 1 MYTH: You have to be a licensed RN or MSW.

**Reality:** Licensure is merely one path to certification. The other is education. Harkey explains how it works.

**You need either:**

A current, active and unrestricted licensure or certification in a health or human services discipline. Examples include RN, LCSW, LMSW, LPC, CRC and CDMS.

OR

A baccalaureate or graduate degree in social work, nursing or another health or human services field that promotes the physical, psychosocial and/or vocational well-being of the persons being served.

### 2 MYTH: Earning the CCM requires formal supervision by a certified case manager.

**Reality:** That's not necessarily true. As with the licensure/education requirement, there are different paths under the employment criteria:

12 months' full-time case management employment experience in the last five years, supervised by a board-certified case manager.

OR

24 months' full-time case management employment experience in the last five years. No supervision by a CCM required, just attestation by your employer.

OR

12 months' full-time case management employment experience as a supervisor of case managers in the last five years. Supervision by a CCM is not required under this category.

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**QUESTIONS?** The Commission offers several resources to prepare for the exam, including a certification guide and certification workshops that are offered three times per year. Information about practice tests and other exam prep resources can be found at [ccmcertification.org/faqs/certification/certification](http://ccmcertification.org/faqs/certification/certification).

of \$75,000-\$80,000 per year, and 40 percent of board-certified case managers report salaries above \$80,000; half of those in executive positions report earning more than \$100,000.<sup>9</sup>

The misconception that professional case management is a lower level position is understandable because the term “case manager” is often used indiscriminately, says Harkey. “But what we’re talking about today are *board-certified* case managers. Each CCM has passed a rigorous, evidence-based exam.” (For more on the exam, see the sidebar.)

Brothers, whose field is workers’ comp, is quite familiar with this myth. “People often say to me, ‘You do case management?’ as if they *really* know what I do.” They don’t. Managing care for injured workers is complex and challenging. She details just some of what is involved: dealing with clients and their families; coordinating medical providers, insurance carriers, employers and attorneys; and ensuring the injured worker is complying with the treatment plan. “I am a field case manager. On any

given day, with any given client, things are different. Trust me. Case management is certainly not a ‘cookie cutter’ position.”

Harkey, a geriatric case manager, agrees. “I deal with the elderly, their families and multiple physicians. It’s a juggling act to keep everyone and everything coordinated and moving forward.”

Being a board-certified case manager demands a special set of skills—skills that are sorely needed: Certified case managers are in greater demand than ever. The Commission’s 2014 Role and Function Study indicated 40.2 percent of employers hiring case managers *require* the CCM. That’s evidence of an increased need for case managers *and* the desire on the part of employers that they are board certified.<sup>10</sup>

“Clearly, this is not a job just *anyone* can do,” Harkey says. “If *anyone* could do health care case management, we wouldn’t be facing the workforce shortages we currently do.” Among the factors driving the shortage: more people with insurance,<sup>11,12</sup> older and sicker

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populations,<sup>13</sup> shrinking primary care capacity—both in terms of shortages and maldistribution,<sup>14,15,16</sup> and an aging case management workforce.<sup>17,18,19</sup>

It’s a tough job, and it’s not for everyone. And that’s the point of certification: It’s the proxy for demonstrating excellence in case management. More than ever, board certification shows that the case manager—*regardless of degree or discipline*—has the capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience to be an effective member of the care team. “We need a ready and adaptable workforce to meet health challenges of the 21st century—challenges that extend far beyond the clinic walls. Social workers offer the skills and talents to meet these challenges,” says Harkey. “And that’s no myth.” ■

9 Health2 Resources and CCMC, *Professional and Demographic Characteristics of CCMs*, September 2015

10 CCMC 2014 Role and Functions Study

11 S. R. Collins, P.W. Rasmussen, M. M. Doty, and S. Beutel. *The Rise in Health Care Coverage and Affordability Since Health Reform Took Effect—Findings from the Commonwealth Fund Biennial Health Insurance Survey, 2014* (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, Jan. 2015).

12 D. McCarthy, D. Radley, and S. Hayes. “Aiming Higher: Results from a Scorecard on State Health System Performance,” 2015 Edition. The Commonwealth Fund, December 2015

13 “NIH-commissioned Census Bureau report highlights effect of aging boomers.” National Institutes of Health, June 2014

14 IHS Inc., *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2013 to 2025*. Prepared for the Association of American Medical Colleges. Washington, DC: Association of American Medical Colleges; 2015

15 J. A. Graves JA, et al. “Role of Geography and Nurse Practitioner Scope-of-Practice in Efforts to Expand Primary Care System Capacity: Health Reform and the Primary Care Workforce.” *Medical Care*, 2016 Jan;54(1):81-9.

16 C. T. Kovner, S. P. Corcoran, C. S. Brewer. “The relative geographic immobility of new registered nurses calls for new strategies to augment that workforce.” *Health Aff (Millwood)*. 2011 Dec;30(12):2293-300.

17 Health policy: Workforce; Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

18 *2015 Case In Point Salary & Trends Special Report*, Dorland Health.

19 “New Year begins with the ‘hottest time’ for case management jobs.” Case Manager Advisor, Jan. 1, 2016.

## About the exam

Board certification via the CCM exam demonstrates the case manager has the capability, knowledge, skills and experience to be an accountable member of the team. The CCM exam itself is rigorous and comprehensive, and it is based on rigorous and comprehensive research. Every five years, the Commission performs a job-task analysis—the Role & Function Study—to capture the current state of case management practice. This research provides the foundation for the exam.

This research has identified five major domains of essential knowledge—the five core components of case management:

- 1 Care Delivery and Reimbursement Methods
- 2 Psychosocial Concepts and Support Systems
- 3 Quality and Outcomes Evaluation and Measurements
- 4 Rehabilitation Concepts and Strategies
- 5 Ethical, Legal and Practice Standards

The test is based on these domains—core knowledge areas that are used by case managers every day. Each domain is further divided into sub-domains—altogether, there are 59.

### All about the exam

The CCM credential brings certainty and clarity to the public, to employers and to fellow team members. Certification—including the exam—is what the Commission is all about. The Commission is the only comprehensive health care case management certification organization accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. “Because it’s not a membership organization, we are free to focus on current case management practice,” says Harkey. This independence allows the Commission to partner with membership organizations such as NASW.

“Partnering with NASW provides us with an important opportunity to continue preparing a professional workforce that is changing and expanding, marking the importance of the health care social worker.”



### About the Commission for Case Manager Certification

*The Commission for Case Manager Certification (the Commission) is the first and largest nationally accredited organization that certifies more than 40,000 professional case managers. The Commission is a nonprofit, volunteer organization that oversees the process of case manager certification with its CCM® credential. The Commission is positioned as the most active and prestigious certification organization supporting the practice of case management. For more information, visit [www.ccmcertification.org](http://www.ccmcertification.org).*



### About the National Association of Social Workers

*The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), in Washington, DC, is the largest membership organization of professional social workers with 130,000 members. It promotes, develops, and protects the practice of social work and social workers. NASW also seeks to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its advocacy. For more information, visit [socialworkers.org](http://socialworkers.org).*

## About the Experts



**Jane Harkey, RN-BC, MSW, CCM  
Chair, Commission for Case  
Manager Certification**



**Veronica Brothers, BSN, RN,  
MSW, LGSW, CCM  
Nurse Case Manager,  
First Rehabilitation Resources**

Jane Harkey is a registered nurse certified in gerontology, who also holds a post-graduate certificate in gerontology from Rutgers University School of Social Work. She operates a private geriatric care management practice that provides assistance to caregivers, and she develops on-line continuing education programs for social workers. She also serves as the chair of the Commission for Case Manager Certification.

Jane began her career working with terminally ill and special needs children, and ended her full-time career instructing continuing education courses at the Rutgers School of Social Work.

Jane has served on numerous state and national task forces, including the National Council on Aging Public Policy Committee and the National Adult Day Services Association (as Public Policy Chair). She is a frequent public speaker and has published articles on case management, care coordination and end-of-life care.

Veronica Brothers is a nurse case manager and works for First Rehabilitation Resources. With bachelor degrees in both nursing and social work, Veronica also holds a masters degree in social work. She has more than a decade of experience providing mental health services to children, adults, adolescents and families, in addition to six years in nursing. Veronica is a first generation American; her first language was Fante. She is active in the arts, as well as in church and family activities within the Ghanaian community.

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