

The Great Debate: Can Anyone be a Health Coach?

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The answer depends on whom you ask.... But this shouldn't be the case. Health coaching has grown by leaps and bounds in the last five years, hence the demand for health coaching education. Companies that offer health coaching education have increased ten-fold in that same time period, making health coaching education a very viable business. The result? Watered-down versions of health coaching definitions and educational programs, hence the qualifications for eligibility to become a health coach. What should a consumer expect?

Case in point: Recently, I accepted an offer of health coaching through my spouse's work insurance. I presumed that my HRA had met the threshold of health coaching due to my elevated total cholesterol level. As a Cardiovascular Clinical Nurse Specialist, Certified Health Coach, and a person with a cardiac surgical history, I must admit, the real reason I agreed to the call was to validate what a typical health coaching call would entail and what qualifications my "health coach" possessed. The call was scheduled and the day and time came.

My "health coach" made no effort to discern what my educational or personal needs were about managing neither my total serum cholesterol nor my interest in it. She proceeded to teach me, which amounted to a mini lecture of sorts without identifying and discussing my personal issues surrounding the behavior change needed to make a difference. She didn't inquire as to my background. I would have appreciated a discussion about my ambivalence and struggles with managing my cholesterol, but this discussion never ensued.

This might cause you to wonder, "What did they talk about for 30 minutes?" The "coach's" discussion had no real focus that I could determine, going from diet to exercise and back, without ever engaging me to talk about me, the "patient" and resident expert about me... my behavior change challenges, what was important to me that I change or what would I prefer help with.

As the session came to a close, it became apparent that my "health coach" had given me some simple directives and shared some educational tidbits. She lacked or failed to use any skills of behavior change necessary to make a difference for me in my cholesterol level, and actually displayed little working knowledge about cholesterol management.

I use my personal experience to make the following point. In this information age, consumers and providers who prescribe these services should be able to expect a high level of active engagement from a qualified health coach who has a working knowledge of health conditions and behavior change, along with a professional license/credential and the liability to provide this guidance.

Delineation should be made between the “health coach” and the “wellness coach” in the interest of consumer protection and his/her ability to discern this difference when making informed decisions about these services, and also for the healthcare provider who prescribes “coachng”. Now is the time to recognize that the future of optimal and appropriate wellness and prevention in healthcare depends on it!

Read NSHC’s Position Statement here:

[Health Coaches & Health Coaching: Definition, Qualifications, Risk and Responsibility, and Differentiation from Wellness Coaching](#)

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