

Spring  
2012  
Issue 3

# News Link



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*The Board  
changed the  
Newsletter  
process and is  
sending links to  
short articles,  
which are  
available on our  
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Statehouse Photo Archive

## Ethics in Multi-Discipline Teams

Colleen Shaughency, LISW-S, is Director of Behavioral Health in an agency in central Ohio. She writes:

Over and over again, I find it necessary to supervise and train therapists in the area of critical thinking skills. I work at an agency that provides medical, dental, OB/GYN and behavioral health services. The desire to help others is so strong that LSW's, LISW's fail to consider or question whether what they are being asked to do by a physician, CEO or other professional is unethical and could possibly put their licensure at risk. For example, the physician requests the assistance with patient who presents as having suicidal ideation. During the joint assessment, the physician decides the individual is not "really" suicidal, however the social worker feels the individual is truly at risk. I have seen too many times that the

social worker will defer to the physician's decision. Another example, is the physician questions whether there is child abuse or neglect occurring but does not want it reported to Children's Services. This issue is actually about a perceived hierarchy which is faulty and risky for all. Many Social Workers have a tendency to undervalue their knowledge and skills. They benefit from an increased awareness of the need to see themselves as educated professionals and to present themselves as such.

This scenario brings up professional ethics areas of concern for counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists:

*4757-5-02 (A) (2) Licensees and registrants shall practice only within the competency areas for which they are qualified by education and training. Licensees and registrants shall maintain appropriate standards of care based on their individual professional license. Standards of care shall be defined as what an ordinary, reasonable professional with similar training would have done in a similar circumstance.*

Working as part of a multi-disciplinary team is becoming more common place, and has clear benefits for clients. As a professional, remember that you are a valued member of that team for the services and expertise that your professional discipline offers. If a client needs treatment, per your assessment, and another professional doesn't agree, how do you communicate effectively to ensure the client is receiving necessary treatment services? How does this fit in with your standards of care? Whether you are independently licensed, or working on clinical experience, seek supervision and consultation with peers. Be sure to document any treatment recommendations. At the end of the day, would another therapist, with the same information, have done the same thing?

*4757-5-10 (B) Counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists are required to comply with all mandatory reporting requirements set forth in the Revised Code, to include, but not limited to (2) Section 2151.421 of the Revised Code- Duty to report child abuse or neglect.*

Simply put, counselors, social workers, and marriage and family therapists are mandatory reporters. It really doesn't matter if you "want to" report. In my 17- years with the board I have never seen a complaint against a licensee result in any disciplinary action for making a report to children's services. The suspected abuse may not be substantiated, but nowhere in the O.R.C. does it require you, as a licensed professional to investigate the suspicion first. On the other hand, the board has disciplined licensees on multiple occasions for **failing** to report child abuse or neglect. Again, as part of a multi-disciplinary team, what steps do you take to educate the team/agency as to your professional approach to mandatory reporting? Are you mindful that you are mandated to report suspected abuse? That another professional did not want to, will not relieve you of your responsibility, and may result in formal discipline against your license.

Thanks to Colleen Shaughency, LISW-S for allowing us to share her comments in the News Link. Questions or comments you would like to see addressed under the "Ethics Issues" column can be sent to: [Tracey.Hosom@cswb.state.oh.us](mailto:Tracey.Hosom@cswb.state.oh.us)