

Any Questions? CPA Ethics On Call and Professional Practice Consultations

Elizabeth Winkelman, JD, PhD & Mary Harb Sheets, PhD

P psychological practice is complicated and we often can benefit from consultation with other professionals when a difficult situation arises. For example, we may be unclear about how an ethical standard applies to a dilemma we are facing, or we may find there is a potential conflict between ethics, legal, or other professional requirements. Confidential ethics and professional practice consultations, valuable resources available free to CPA members, are just a phone call away.

Ethics consultations focus on helping members think through ethical quandaries. Ethics Committee members are experienced in the application of the APA Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct (Ethics Code) to the work of psychologists. Using an educative and collaborative process, a Committee member will help you sort through the issues you are facing from an ethical perspective. Resources and referrals may also be provided. To request an ethics consultation, please call (916) 286-7979 ext. 114.

Professional practice consultations help members address issues related to standards of professional conduct. The format of a professional practice consultation involves an educative and collaborative process that supports decision-making consistent with applicable laws and regulations as well as other sources of professional guidance. CPA does not provide legal advice to members and may offer referrals to a private attorney if needed. For a professional practice consultation, please contact CPA's Director of Professional Affairs, Dr. Elizabeth Winkelman, at (916) 662-3792 or ewinkelman@cpapsych.org.

If it is unclear which type of consultation to request, first consider whether the question is primarily related to an ethical principal or standard. For example, an ethics consultation may be helpful in deciding whether a new client relationship would be considered a multiple relationship or a conflict of interest under Ethics Code standards 3.05 and 3.06. Another example would be obtaining an ethics consult to help plan for an interruption or termination of therapy consistent with Ethics Code standards 10.09 and 10.10.

If a question is primarily related to a legal, regulatory or other applicable standard, a professional practice consultation would be appropriate. For example, consultation can help members to determine whether or not an incident is reportable as child abuse under the California Child Abuse and



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Mary Harb Sheets, PhD

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Neglect Reporting Act. Additional topics addressed in professional practice consultations include billing, telehealth and duty to protect.

In many cases, there is no bright line between ethical and professional practice issues. Consultations often involve both ethical and legal components, as well as clinical and risk management considerations. In fact, as in many other states, California law incorporates the APA Ethics Code as its standard for ethical conduct. Patient welfare is an overarching concern that must always be taken into account. Some or all of these factors may be involved when deciding on a course of action in a particular situation.

When a psychologist is unsure whether or not consultation is needed at all, the best course of action is to follow through by contacting CPA or another trusted resource. Psychologists who have questions or feel uneasy about a particular client or

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situation are likely tuning in to an important issue that should be explored. Sometimes simply talking through a plan of action with a trusted colleague who has relevant expertise is sufficient. At other times, important steps may be need to be taken to protect your client, yourself and your practice.

The complexities of psychology practice – including the interplay between clinical, ethical, legal and risk management issues – are part of what makes being a psychologist so challenging and rewarding. Being part of CPA connects psychologists to consultation and other resources that promote excellence in practice. In addition, being part of CPA connects psychologists to a whole community of colleagues who can enrich and complement each other's work. ■

Note: CPA does not and cannot provide legal advice to our membership. Those seeking legal advice are advised to consult a private attorney prior to making decisions about individual circumstances.

REFERENCES

- APA Ethical Principles for Psychologists and Code of Conduct – <http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>
- California Board of Psychology Laws and Regulations – http://www.psychology.ca.gov/laws_regs/2015lawsregs.pdf
- Ethical Dilemma Analysis with Risk Management Considerations Flow Chart [<http://www.cpapsych.org/?page=123>]

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