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AGPA and IBCGP Guidelines for Ethics

Introduction

The American Group Psychotherapy Association is a multi-disciplinary, membership organization dedicated to advancing knowledge, research, and training in group psychotherapy and other group interventions to benefit the client/patient population. The International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists advances group psychotherapy by certifying group psychotherapists according to nationally accepted criteria, and promotes these practitioners and principles to other mental health professionals, employers, insurers, educators, and clients for the purpose of maintaining the highest standards for group psychotherapy practice and quality care. Membership in AGPA and/or inclusion in the Certification Board requires adherence to standards of ethical practice as outlined by state licensing boards and/or designated national professional organizations, whichever was applicable in establishing clinical credentials. Those who do not belong to a professional group having a published standard of ethics must follow the principles of ethics established by the American Psychological Association.

Ethical complaints about individuals who are members of AGPA and/or listed in the Certification Board should be directed to the state licensing board or, in the absence of a state license, to the designated primary professional organization of the individual. Should an ethical complaint be received regarding an individual who is a member of AGPA and/or listed in the Certification Board whose state does not have licensure and who does not belong to a primary professional organization, the complainant will be directed to the state or federal legal system to file his or her complaint.

In the event of the revocation, suspension or voluntary relinquishment of a clinical license to practice or membership/certification in the designated national professional organization, membership in AGPA and/or inclusion in the Certification Board will be revoked. In the event an individual referred to the governmental agencies or courts of law is found guilty, his or her AGPA membership and/or his or her inclusion in the Certification Board will be revoked. It is the responsibility of the individual to inform AGPA and/or the Certification Board of any revocation, suspension or voluntary relinquishment of licensure or membership/certification, whichever was used to verify clinical credentials for inclusion in the Certification Board.

Guidelines of Group Psychotherapy Practice

The following guidelines of group psychotherapy practice shall serve as models for group therapists' ethical behavior.



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Responsibility to Patient/Client

1. The group psychotherapist provides services with respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each patient/client as well as the rights and autonomy of the individual patient/client.

1.1 The group psychotherapist shall provide the potential group patient/client with information about the nature of group psychotherapy and apprise him or her of the risks, rights and obligations as a member of a therapy group.

1.2 The group psychotherapist shall encourage the patient/client's participation in group psychotherapy only so long as it is appropriate to the patient/client's needs.

1.3 The group psychotherapist shall not practice or condone any form of discrimination that includes, but is not limited to nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, size, disability, age, religion, socioeconomic status or cultural background, except that this guideline shall not prohibit group therapy practice with population specific or problem specific groups.

2. The group psychotherapist safeguards the patient/client's right to privacy by judiciously protecting information of a confidential nature.

2.1 The group shall agree that the patient/client as well as the psychotherapist shall protect the identity of its members.

2.2 The group therapist is knowledgeable about the limits of privileged communication as they apply to group therapy and informs group members of those limits.

2.3 The group psychotherapist shall not use identifiable information about the group or its members for teaching purposes, publication or professional presentations unless permission has been obtained and all measures have been taken to preserve patient/client anonymity.

2.4 Except where required by law, the group psychotherapist shall share information about the group members with others only after obtaining appropriate patient/client consent. Specific permission must be requested to permit conferring with the referring therapist or with the individual therapist where the patient/client is in conjoint therapy.

2.5 When clinical examination suggests that a patient/client may be dangerous to himself/herself or others, it is the group psychotherapist's ethical and legal obligation to take appropriate steps in order to be responsible to society in general, as well as the patient/client.

3. The group psychotherapist acts to safeguard the patient/client and the public from the incompetent, unethical, illegal practice of any group psychotherapist.

3.1 The group psychotherapist must be aware of her/his own individual competencies, and when the needs of the patient/client are beyond the competencies of the psychotherapist, consultation must be sought from other qualified professionals or other appropriate sources.

3.2 The group psychotherapist shall not use her/his professional relationship to advance personal or business interests.

3.3 Sexual intimacy with patients/clients is unethical.

3.4 The group psychotherapist shall protect the patient/client and the public from misinformation and misrepresentation. She/he shall not use false or misleading advertising regarding her/his qualifications or skills as a group psychotherapist.

Professional Standards

The group psychotherapist shall maintain the integrity of the practice of group psychotherapy.

1. It is the personal responsibility of the group psychotherapist to maintain competence in the practice of group psychotherapy through formal educational activities and informal learning experiences.

2. The group psychotherapist has a responsibility to contribute to the ongoing development of the body of knowledge pertaining to group psychotherapy whether involved as an investigator, participant or user of research results.

3. The group psychotherapist shall accept the obligation to attempt to inform and alert other group psychotherapists who are violating ethical principles or to bring those violations to the attention of appropriate professional authorities.

(Revised, February 2002)