



## Notes from the College April 2016

### Special Note on Psychology in the Public Service and Advocacy

An issue that has recently come to the College's attention is that of the expectations of some employers in regard to psychologists' workload. For example, some psychologists are expected to manage caseloads approaching 100 clients or more. It is important to reflect upon how this may impact the quality of the service being provided. Simply having access to the psychologist regardless of the number of clients they already are trying to provide a service to, could create a situation where the psychologist who has a responsibility to do no harm, cannot provide the best service possible because of the demands placed on them to manage large numbers. And yet the employer expects the psychologist to continue to do intakes/accept referrals in spite of the caseload.

Another area of concern is when employers intentionally or unintentionally expand the appropriate scope of practice of a psychologist through expecting them to perform duties for which they were never trained. Or, when employers without consultation with the psychologists determine what the sufficient training will be to enable them to provide a new service. In such situations the psychologist may feel that they have little choice but to participate. An example might be a clinically trained psychologist working with youth being asked to conduct an assessment to determine if the youth has an autistic spectrum disorder when they have no experience doing such assessments, or a psychologist trained in educational psychology who is working in a school and is expected to conduct risk assessments of students who may pose a danger to other students, or staff when they have not training in how to conduct such an assessment.

The Professional Practice Guidelines that address these kinds of issues:

- . 3.2.2 Employment settings - A member shall assume responsibility for the planning, delivery, and supervision of all the psychological services he/she provides to a client. Members working as employees shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that their work setting adheres to the "Professional Practice Guidelines" in the planning, delivery, supervision and billing practices of all psychological services provided.
- . 5.32 Avoiding harm -A member must take steps to avoid harming any individuals with whom he/she works or has a professional relationship.
- . 8.2 Services appropriate to needs -A member must provide psychological services which are appropriate and adequate to the client's needs and which respect the confidential nature of the professional relationship between the member and the client.
- . 8.6 Sufficient personnel -A member must employ sufficient personnel to maintain the quality of any psychological services offered by, or under the supervision of, the member.
- . 8.9 Provision of services in sponsoring agency -Where a member offers psychological services or is directing the psychological services of others within a sponsoring institution and the member believes that the most appropriate service(s) to a client is not in accord with the expectations of the sponsoring institution, the supervising member must attempt to reconcile these differences with the administration of the institution in order to respond to the client's needs.

Protecting the public by encouraging excellence in psychology.

The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition) also weighs in on these matters. Under Principle II - Responsible Caring, standards II. 1, II. 2, speak to protecting and promoting the welfare of clients, and avoiding doing harm to clients. Standard II. 6, is a reminder to work within one's area of competence. And, among others, standard II. 21, reminds to the psychologist to strive to provide and/or obtain the best possible service for those needing and seeking psychological services.

The Professional Practice Guidelines and the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists provide a foundation through which psychologists not only have support from the profession but also a responsibility, to address issues such as those described above, (i.e. being expected to deal with unmanageable caseloads, or to provide services for which they were not trained or have not established competence in, among others).

The College cannot advocate for psychologists in their dealings with their employer. Psychologists can receive input from the College regarding particular dilemmas they may be having with their employer by submitting questions to the College that will be addressed by the Registrar or the Professional Practice and Ethics Committee.

But more than this, advocacy is what is needed. It is needed in the form of a unified group of psychologists who share similar problems with employers who can be organized to address these issues. This can be accomplished best through the advocacy body for the profession, the Psychological Association of Saskatchewan (PAS).

If you wish to voice any questions/concerns in regard to these types of employment issues, you can contact PAS at [info@psychsask.ca](mailto:info@psychsask.ca). If you would like to join the association you can apply online at [www.psychsask.ca](http://www.psychsask.ca). For the profession to remain strong and healthy it needs both a body to regulate psychological practice and a professional association to advocate for us. So if you are having difficulties with your employment in the public system, please begin to organize yourselves through PAS.

Finally, it is important to state that this note is not meant to suggest that you must take a particular action. Whether to act or not is not something that the College or anyone else can decide for you. This note is intended to provide support should you wish to make a case with an employer about your ethical and professional responsibilities.

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