GUIDELINES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEMS

INTRODUCTION

Psychologists practice in an increasingly diverse range of health care delivery systems. This diversification is due to widening recognition of the unique skills of psychologists and the value of psychological services for health and wellbeing, and to rapidly evolving systems in which health care is being delivered. At the same time, psychologists’ roles within these settings are also expanding, and interdisciplinary collaboration within health care is becoming commonplace.

The following guidelines are intended to assist psychologists, other health care providers, administrators in health care delivery systems, and the public to conceptualize the roles and responsibilities of psychologists in these diverse contexts. They may also be used to inform rule making and decision making in health care delivery systems about the roles of psychologists that are commensurate with their training and licensure. Federal and state laws, regulations of accrediting bodies (e.g., The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations [JCAHO], 2009), and institutional bylaws are also relevant to these decisions. These guidelines build upon earlier guidelines regarding hospital privileges, credentialing and bylaws specific to hospital settings (American Psychological Association (APA), 1991) and draw on the issues highlighted in an additional APA document regarding practicing psychology in hospitals from that same time period (APA, 1998).
The term “guidelines” refers to statements that suggest or recommend specific professional behavior, endeavors, or conduct for psychologists. Guidelines differ from “standards” in that standards are mandatory and may be accompanied by an enforcement mechanism. Thus, guidelines are aspirational in intent. They are intended to facilitate the continued systematic development of the profession and to help ensure a high level of professional practice by psychologists. Guidelines are not intended to be mandatory or exhaustive and may not be applicable to every professional and clinical situation. They are not definitive and they are not intended to take precedence over the judgment of psychologists.

We use the term “patient” to refer to the child, adolescent, adult, older adult, couple, family, group, organization, community, or other population receiving psychological services in health care delivery systems. However, we recognize that in many situations there are important and valid reasons for using such terms as “client” or “person” in place of “patient” to describe the recipient of services. These guidelines are informed by the Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (“Ethics Code”) (APA, 2002) and the Record Keeping Guidelines (APA, 2007).

I. Distinct Professional Identity within the Health Care Delivery System.

1. Psychologists remain cognizant of their ethical and legal obligations as members of a distinct and autonomous profession.

Rationale
Participation in multidisciplinary diagnosis and treatment within complex systems necessitates psychologists' careful attention to maintaining their distinct professional identity and responsibilities. Persons treated in health care delivery systems, as in all other settings, should receive the highest quality of psychological services. Integration of psychological services into a broad range of modalities and systems of care cannot allow for the quality of these services to be diluted, or for colleagues without adequate training or experience to be assigned to deliver them.

Application

Consistent with applicable legal requirements, psychologists strive to avoid providing services beyond the boundaries of their competence (Ethics Code 2.01). Similarly, they strive to avoid delegating work to persons who cannot be expected to perform competently on the basis of their education, training, or experience, either independently or with the level of supervision being provided (Ethics Code 2.05). They strive to avoid compromising their professional judgment in response to constraints or pressure posed by other professionals or systemic factors. Psychologists advocate for adequate budgeting, staffing, supervision, and specialty competence for psychological services. When psychologists are administratively responsible to someone of a different professional discipline, they seek to sensitize the administrator to the psychologist's own responsibility for planning, directing and reviewing psychological services. Psychologists remain aware that codified ethical and legal standards are likely to be interpreted as pertaining to the full range of health
care delivery systems, and to every professional psychological role within such systems, unless otherwise specified.

2. Psychologists seek to understand the internally and externally imposed expectations and requirements of the systems within which they practice.

Rationale

Effective and appropriate patient care depends upon sufficient familiarity with the environment, culture, and context in which such care is delivered. Health care delivery systems are complex and highly structured organizations that rely upon the prompt and accurate availability of personal data and clinical services. Psychologists are typically obliged to disclose to patients the nature of their relationship with the organization, the probable use of the services provided and information obtained, and who will have access to the information.

Application

Psychologists strive to maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the health care delivery systems within which they practice, including site-specific expectations and requirements for: patient admission, management, and discharge; treatment protocols; emergencies; patient safety, restraint, and restrictions of freedom; procedure codes and billing/bundling; informed consent; documentation and record keeping systems; and other issues. They seek to learn the institutional by-laws, administrative reporting, interdisciplinary relations, and organizational and governing structure of the
They also strive to familiarize themselves with the pertinent regulations of the accrediting bodies for the health care delivery systems, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) (1996), and applicable state and federal laws governing the practice of psychology and hospital licensure. Psychologists recognize that active participation in the administration of health care delivery systems enables them to contribute to the development of optimal institutional policies and procedures regarding psychological practice and records, thereby maintaining high professional standards. In turn, this enhances the capacity of the health care delivery system to utilize psychologists’ expertise to provide maximum benefit to patients and to the organization itself.

Psychologists appreciate that their ethical obligations to protect patient confidentiality may be more stringent than other rules governing the exchange of health information among providers within the health care delivery system. This discrepancy necessitates vigilance on the part of psychologists in their informal communication with interdisciplinary colleagues, their communication with patients via technology, and in formal documentation within patient records. In settings where it is relevant, psychologists strive to inform institutional policies and the technology for safeguarding mental health information in electronic health records.
3. Psychologists are prepared to clarify their unique roles and services and how these relate to those of other health care professionals.

Rationale

The successful development, integration, and delivery of psychological services in health care delivery systems depends upon psychologists' ability, willingness, and opportunity to explain how they can contribute to effective prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and/or rehabilitation services, and to enhance patient satisfaction with, and adherence to, recommended care. Fostering other professionals' understanding of the skills and potential contributions of psychologists is dependent upon psychologists' reciprocal understanding of the roles, skills and contributions of other professional disciplines.

Application

Psychologists strive to create opportunities for collegial as well as public discourse regarding their unique roles and services, and to demonstrate how psychologists' knowledge, skills, training, education, and experience complement and enhance those of other health care professionals. In order to do this effectively, psychologists continually strive to understand and appreciate fully the roles and services of other professionals within the health care delivery system. Psychologists maintain a level of familiarity with the Ethics Code that enables them to convey its requirements in an appropriate fashion and accessible language to their non-psychologist colleagues. When organizational demands conflict with ethical obligations, psychologists clarify the nature of the conflict,
establish their commitment to mandatory sources of ethical guidance, and to the extent feasible, resolve the conflict in a way that permits adherence to the Ethics Code (Ethics Code 1.03). In such circumstances, psychologists strive to avoid harm to patients. These processes reflect the general purpose that, when indicated and professionally justified, psychologists cooperate with other professionals in order to serve their patients effectively and appropriately (Ethics Code 3.09).

II. Privileges

4. Psychologists are encouraged to seek appropriate staff appointments and clinical privileges within health care delivery systems.

Rationale

Psychologists seek the highest level of staff membership within the departments, specialty units and/or clinical programs in health care delivery systems, as well as the broadest range of privileges within those systems, that is consistent with their training and expertise. They develop an accurate understanding of the medical staff categories and the range of clinical privileges for which they may be eligible, including the training and experience qualifications required for each. Psychologists’ applications for staff appointments and privileges reflect the boundaries of their professional competence and the nature of their involvement in a given health care delivery system. Psychologists are encouraged to use the title “doctor” in recognition of
their extensive doctoral-level education and training, as well as their longstanding
history of independent licensure and independent management of patient care.

Application

The nature and requirements for staff appointments within health care
delivery systems are determined by institutional bylaws and accreditation
standards (e.g., JCAHO), and, in some cases, state and federal laws. Health
care delivery systems will vary in terms of the categories for staff appointments
(e.g., “full medical staff,” “allied health provider,” “active,” “consulting,” etc.).
Most, however, will distinguish between full-time, part-time, and temporary staff.
Whenever possible, psychologists seek a level of staff appointment that allows
voting for bylaws, officers, and other governance matters; typically this will mean
full medical staff membership and privileges. The criteria for assigning clinical
privileges (patient care responsibilities) are determined by the rules of clinical
departments, specialty units or programs, under the auspices of the medical
staff. Psychologists who do not have privileges or appointments and will
continue to provide psychological services to patients within a health care
delivery system (e.g. when a patient is hospitalized) seek temporary privileges or
appointments to permit continuity of care. It is important for psychologists to
understand the staff categories, clinical privileges, application processes, and
timeline for review and approval, and the supervision requirements for patient
care pending the assignment of privileges. They are also encouraged to
familiarize themselves with procedures governing staff appointments, privileges,
sanctions, and appeals.
5. **Psychologists strive to be involved in the development of institutional policies regarding professional scope of practice and participation in service delivery.**

**Rationale**

Psychologists recognize that active participation in health care delivery system administration enables them to contribute to, as well as to monitor, the development of institutional policies and procedures that affect the practice of psychology. In turn, optimal policies and procedures for the practice of psychology ensure that their expertise is utilized appropriately and for maximum benefit, and that high professional standards for psychological practice are upheld.

**Application**

Commensurate with their training and expertise, psychologists seek to be involved in program, service, and departmental leadership, including participation in establishing criteria for specific clinical privileges for psychologists. They also seek and accept appointment to medical staff committees for credentialing which provide peer review and oversight for the granting and renewal of both staff appointments and clinical privileges, as well as the determination of internal sanctions for psychologists who violate rules and regulations. Similarly, they strive to be actively involved in leadership activities concerned with quality improvement and risk management.
III. Integrative and Collaborative Care

6. Psychologists are encouraged to function in multidisciplinary positions with diverse roles and responsibilities.

Rationale

Psychologists may continue to provide traditional psychological services in health care delivery systems, such as mental status examinations, emergency evaluation and triage, diagnostic evaluation and assessment, and psychotherapy. However, psychologists are increasingly working with multidisciplinary teams in wellness programs, primary care, behavioral medicine (or mind-body medicine) programs, care of patients with acute and chronic medical conditions, and end-of-life care.

Application

Psychologists’ scope of practice includes both direct service delivery and consultation within teams of other health care providers. Their training and expertise are well-suited for collaboration with other disciplines, such as: enhancing communication with patients; observing behavior change in relation to symptom/disease progression, medication, and other interventions; attending to problems with continuity of care; facilitating decision-making; problem-solving to maximize adherence to treatment regimens; adjusting practices as needed for patients with developmental, behavioral, or psychiatric conditions; attending to issues of culture, spirituality, and other factors related to health beliefs and behavior; attending to life span developmental issues and aging; involving family or other support systems in order to maximize treatment outcome; ensuring
quality of life considerations in treatment decision making, including end-of-life

care; and negotiating differences of opinion among patients, families, or health
care providers. Therefore, psychologists are urged to seek ways to integrate
their unique expertise in diverse aspects of patient care.

7. Psychologists are encouraged to promote the optimal delivery of
their services through effective communication with other health
care professionals.

Rationale

Health care delivery systems are comprised of providers from a variety of
disciplines and training backgrounds. To effect optimal patient care,
psychologists strive to learn and speak the “languages” of the systems in which
they work and are mindful of communicating psychological concepts in a manner
that is comprehensible to other professionals. Psychologists seek to participate
in multidisciplinary team meetings where the goals, observations, and services of
different providers can be integrated for optimal care.

Application

As participants in multidisciplinary health care delivery systems,
psychologists understand the formal and informal means by which information is
exchanged and documented. Psychologists are prepared to communicate their
ideas, opinions, and questions in language that is understandable to the non-
psychologist health care providers with whom they interact. Psychologists
operationalize discipline-specific terms and concepts, including those explicating
the mind-body connection in the context of the specific health issues in question.

Psychologists remain careful to uphold ethical standards for patient confidentiality.

8. **Psychologists strive to provide collaborative services in the broadest range of health care settings, and to apply their expertise to the full spectrum of health issues.**

**Rationale**

As health care delivery systems become increasingly diverse and comprehensive, the roles played by psychologists also become more varied and potentially complex. Psychologists are increasingly found in a variety of health care settings dealing with the full range of conditions and diagnoses, whether considered medical, behavioral, developmental, or psychiatric.

**Application**

Psychological expertise is useful in a wide range of settings (e.g., hospitals, primary care settings, rehabilitation facilities, nursing homes, and outpatient clinics), serving patients with a variety of conditions (e.g., diabetes, cancer, cardiac conditions, traumatic injuries, neurological conditions, developmental disorders, and/or psychiatric conditions). Specifically, psychologists' roles include, but are not limited to: helping patients and families adjust to diagnoses of chronic and/or life-threatening medical conditions, including assisting them in adherence to difficult or painful treatment regimens; assisting patients and providers with pain management; evaluating candidates...
for bariatric surgery or transplant; promoting positive health behaviors, such as
smoking cessation and compliance with diet and exercise regimens; providing
consultation to physicians and other providers regarding effective ways to
communicate with patients and their families; providing developmental,
psychological, or neuropsychological assessment; providing or overseeing
intervention for developmental or behavioral problems; evaluating and treating
psychiatric conditions; and consulting with providers in systems other than health
care delivery systems (e.g., schools, corrections, and private practice).

IV. Competency

9. Psychologists involved in practice within health care delivery systems strive to gain and maintain appropriately specialized competence.

Rationale

In health care delivery systems, psychologists are called to take on a diversity of roles within their areas of expertise. These include, but are not limited to:
providing psychological assessment; leading and participating in multidisciplinary treatment planning; conducting psychotherapeutic or counseling intervention;
taking a leadership role in admission, diagnosis, treatment, consultation order,
and discharge decision-making; training and professional development for both psychologists and professionals from other disciplines; engaging in scientific research; and serving in health care delivery system management and
administration roles. Psychologists are qualified to fulfill these roles in health care delivery systems by virtue of their doctoral-level education, specialized training, and experience. It is, of course, important that they keep abreast of the specific knowledge and skills relevant to their particular job roles and duties.

Application

Psychologists are encouraged to seek continuing education and training that would enhance the performance of their specific job roles and duties within health care delivery systems. In new emerging areas in health care service delivery, they strive to take reasonable steps to ensure the competence of their work by using relevant research, training, consultation, and/or study.

Psychologists are mindful of the specialized training needed for working with, for example, pediatric or geriatric populations. As the issues with which they are faced become increasingly complex, and the potential emotional burden of their work increases, psychologists actively seek to maintain self care to ensure their continued competence (Ethics Code, 2.06).

10. Psychologists are encouraged to offer their special expertise in the administration and management of both psychological and other professional practice within health care delivery systems.

Rationale:

The doctoral-level education and training of psychologists includes:
system, and organizational development; and human behavior in groups and organizational systems. In conjunction with their specific training and experience working within health care delivery systems, psychologists offer unique perspectives and expertise in the administration and management of psychological and other professional practice.

**Application**

Psychologists strive to be involved in those aspects of the management of psychological and other professional practice within health care delivery systems that are within the scope of their education, training and expertise. These include, but are not limited to: the supervision of psychological and related services; involvement in health care ethics committees; and membership on Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). Psychologists are also encouraged to be involved in those organizational bodies within health care delivery systems that conduct peer review, address scope of practice issues, and/or grant initial and continued credentialing.

This document is scheduled to expire by [    ]. After this date, users are encouraged to contact the APA Practice Directorate to confirm that this document remains in effect.

**References**


