

Therapeutic Relationships and Professional Boundaries

Intent

To advise Registrants on how to establish and maintain appropriate therapeutic relationships and professional boundaries with patients.

Definitions

Mandatory Report: Under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, it is mandatory that a report be made by a regulated health professional who, in the course of practicing their profession, acquires information leading to reasonable grounds to believe that another regulated health care professional sexually abused a patient.

Family Member: For the purpose of this standard, “family member” means a Registrant’s spouse or partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent or grandchild; a parent, child, sibling, grandparent or grandchild of the Registrant’s spouse or partner.

Close Personal Relationship: For the purpose of this standard, “close personal relationship” means a relationship in which the Registrant has personal or emotional involvement with an individual that may render the Registrant unable to exercise objective professional judgment in reaching diagnostic or therapeutic decisions.

Minor Condition: Generally, a non-urgent, non-serious condition that requires only short-term routine care and is not likely to be an indication of, or lead to, a more serious condition.

Emergency: Exists where an individual is apparently experiencing severe suffering or is at risk of sustaining serious bodily harm if intervention is not promptly provided.

STANDARD 1

The Registrant fosters appropriate therapeutic relationships with their patients in a transparent, ethical, patient-centered manner with respect for diversity of beliefs, values, and interests.

A Registrant demonstrates the standard by:

- recognizing the position of power the Registrant has over the patient within the therapeutic relationship,
- not exploiting these relationships for any form of non-therapeutic or personal gain, benefit or advantage,
- never entering into a sexual relationship with a current patient or someone with whom the patient has a significant personal relationship (e.g., child’s parent),
- not entering into a sexual relationship with a former patient unless it can be reasonably established that a minimum of one year has elapsed since the professional relationship ended or was terminated and it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a power imbalance between the Registrant and the patient,
- never entering into a sexual relationship with a former patient where mental health counselling was a significant part of treatment,
- not entering into a therapeutic relationship and/or accepting a patient with whom the Registrant already has a personal relationship and where professional boundaries may not be sustained,
- taking immediate steps to address and rectify a boundary violation when it occurs; and
- accepting responsibility for boundary crossings and violations when they occur.

STANDARD 2

The Registrant understands that patient consent is never a defence against a boundary violation.

A Registrant demonstrates the standard by:

- developing and maintaining practices and procedures to explain to the patient that consent does not permit a non-therapeutic relationship or allow for a personal relationship with the patient, and
- when appropriate, clearly and diplomatically explaining why patient consent does not justify a boundary violation.

STANDARD 3

The Registrant does not provide naturopathic services to their own family members or another individual with whom they have a close personal relationship except for minor conditions or in the event of an emergency.

A Registrant demonstrates the standard by:

- maintaining practices and procedures that clearly demonstrate that provision of naturopathic services to an individual with whom the Registrant has a personal relationship may be inappropriate as outlined in legislation and/or if professional boundaries may not be sustainable,
- clearly, sensitively, and consistently explaining why naturopathic services cannot be provided, and
- not treating a person with whom they are having a sexual relationship, except in an emergency.

STANDARD 4

The Registrant provides a mandatory report if they have reasonable and probable grounds to believe that another Registrant, or a Registrant of another health profession has sexually abused a patient.

The Registrant demonstrates this standard by:

- notifying the patient of their legal obligation to report the sexual abuse to the provider's regulatory college,
- explaining that the patient's name can only be provided if they consent, but if the patient does not consent to include their name that the report will still be filed without that information, and
- submitting the written report to the appropriate regulatory body within 30 days of learning of the sexual abuse, or sooner if the registrant has reasonable grounds to believe that the patient will continue to be sexually abused.