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## **Psychologist-Patient Services Agreement**

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Welcome to our practice. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about our professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that we provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment and health care operations. The Notice, which is attached to this Agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires that we obtain your signature acknowledging that we have provided you with this information. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures at any time. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on us unless we have taken action in reliance on it; if there are obligations imposed on us by your health insurer in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist or provider and patient, and the particular problems you are experiencing. There are many different methods our providers may use to treat the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience temporary uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, your psychologist will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with your provider. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about our procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, we will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

## **MEETINGS**

Your psychologist normally conducts an evaluation that will last from 1 to 3 sessions. During this time, you can decide if your psychologist is the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, either in-person or through telehealth, your doctor will explain how to schedule one 55-minute session per week, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 business hours advance notice of cancellation. It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions.

## **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

Our session fee is \$160 per hour or is based on your insurance provider's agreement. In addition to weekly appointments, we charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though we will break down the hourly cost if we work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, consulting with other professionals with your permission, preparation of records or treatment you may request of your provider. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require our participation, you will be expected to pay for all of our professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, even if your psychologist is called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal

involvement, we charge \$200 per hour for preparation, travel and attendance at any legal proceeding.

## **CONTACTING YOUR PSYCHOLOGIST**

Due to our varied work schedules and the improbability of your doctor answering the phone when with a patient, your psychologist is often not immediately available by telephone or email. When case managers are unavailable, the telephone and email are answered either by our staff who know where to reach the doctor, or by voice mail that is monitored frequently. Our staff monitor messages Monday through Friday from 8am to 6pm. Your doctor will make every effort to respond to your inquiry on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform us of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach your psychologist and feel that you can't wait for the return call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call 911. If your doctor will be unavailable for an extended time, we will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

## **LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY**

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist. In most situations, we can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written Authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:

- We may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, we make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of the patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, we will not tell you about these consultations unless we feel that it is important to our work together. We will note all consultations in your Clinical Record (which is called "PHI" in my Notice of Psychologist's Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).
- We also have a privacy contract with our accountants. As required by HIPAA, we have a formal business associate contract with them, in which they promise to maintain the confidentiality of data except as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law. If you wish, we can provide you with a blank copy of this contract.

- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in this Agreement.
- If a patient seriously threatens to harm himself/herself, we may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection. The law provides that a professional may disclose confidential information only to medical or law enforcement personnel if the professional determines that there is a probability of imminent physical injury by the patient to the patient or others, or there is a probability of immediate mental or emotional injury to the patient.

There are some situations where we are permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or Authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your diagnosis and treatment, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. We cannot provide any information without your (or your legal representative's) written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order us to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, we may be required to provide it for them.
- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against us, we may disclose relevant information regarding that patient in order to defend ourselves.
- If a patient files a worker's compensation claim, we must, upon appropriate request, provide records relating to treatment or hospitalization for which compensation is being sought.

There are some situations in which we are legally obligated to take actions, which we believe are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm, and we may have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. These situations are unusual in clinical practice.

- If we have cause to believe that a child under 18 has been or may be abused or neglected (including physical injury, substantial threat of harm, mental or

emotional injury, or any kind of sexual contact or conduct), or that a child is a victim of a sexual offense, or that an elderly or disabled person is in a state of abuse, neglect or exploitation, the law requires that your doctor makes a report to the appropriate governmental agency, usually the Department of Protective or Regulatory Services. Once such report is filed, we may be required to provide additional information.

- If we determine that there is a probability that the patient will inflict imminent physical injury on another, or that the patient will inflict imminent physical, mental or emotional harm upon him/herself, or others, we may be required to take protective action by disclosing information to medical or law enforcement personnel or by securing hospitalization of the patient.

If such a situation arises, we will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action, and we will limit disclosure to what is necessary. While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and we are not attorneys. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

## **PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

You should be aware that, pursuant to HIPAA, we keep Protected Health Information about you in two sets of professional records. One set constitutes your Clinical Record. It includes information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem impacts on your life, your diagnosis, the goals that we set for treatment, your progress towards those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, any past treatment records that we receive from other providers, reports of any professional consultations, your billing records, and any reports that have been sent to anyone, including reports to your insurance carrier. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing. You should be aware that pursuant to the law, psychological test data are not part of a patient's record. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, we recommend that you initially review them in the presence of a trained clinician, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most circumstances, we are allowed to charge a copying fee

of \$6 per page (and for certain other expenses). The exceptions to this policy are contained in the attached Notice Form. If we refuse your request for access to your Clinical Record, you have a right of review, which we will discuss with you upon your request.

In addition, we also keep a set of Psychotherapy Notes. These Notes are for your doctor's own use and are designed to assist in providing you with the best treatment. While the contents of Psychotherapy Notes vary from client to client, they can include the contents of our conversations, your doctor's analysis of those conversations, and how they impact on your therapy. They also contain particularly sensitive information that you may reveal to your psychologist that is not required to be included in your Clinical Record. These Psychotherapy Notes are kept separate from your Clinical Record. While insurance companies can request and receive a copy of your Clinical Record, they cannot receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Notes without your signed, written Authorization. Insurance companies cannot require your Authorization as a condition of coverage nor penalize you in any way for your refusal. You may examine and/or receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Notes unless your doctor determines that release would be harmful to your physical, mental or emotional health.

## **PATIENT RIGHTS**

HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Record and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that your doctor amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Record is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about our policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to a paper copy of this Agreement, the attached Notice form, and our privacy policies and procedures.

## **MINORS AND PARENTS**

Patients under 18 years of age who are not emancipated and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child's treatment records. However, if the treatment is for suicide prevention, chemical addiction or dependency, or sexual, physical or emotional abuse, the law provides that parents may not access their child's records. For children between 16 and 18, because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is our policy to request an agreement from the patient and his/her parents that the parents consent to give up their access to their child's records. If they agree, during treatment, the psychologist will

provide them only with general information about the progress of the child's treatment, and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. We will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's Authorization, unless the doctor feels that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, the psychologist will notify the parents of the concern. Before giving parents any information, the doctor will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and we will do our best to handle any objections he/she may have.

## **BILLING AND PAYMENTS**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, we have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court which will require us to disclose otherwise confidential information. In most collection situations, the only information we release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

## **INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT**

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. We will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance we can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of our fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, we will provide you with whatever information we can based on our experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, we will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require

authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While much can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow your doctor to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, we will do our best to find another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy.

You should also be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that we provide it with information relevant to the services provided to you. We are required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes we are required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire Clinical Record. In such situations, we will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, we have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. We will provide you with a copy of any report we submit, if you request it. By signing this Agreement, you agree that we can provide requested information to your carrier.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end your sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for our services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

**WELCOME TO OUR PRACTICE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU!**

Signature of patient \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of responsible party \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_