

PROPOSED ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR WORK IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

The purpose of this article is to set forth some ethical practice guidelines for human service workers with less than professional qualifications.¹ The growing awareness of social, behavioural and mental health problems in our society ranging from hyper-active children who cannot read to depressed housewives who cannot cope, has resulted in the need for more personnel in the human service fields. Increasingly, the helping professionals have been aided and abetted in their work by a growing number of aids or assistants who work under their direction in the fields of psychiatry, psychology, social work, nursing, the ministry, the law and vocational and educational counselling. Sometimes referred to as the "new careers worker" (Golann and Eisdorfer: 1972) or the "new professional" (Dugger: 1975), such workers may have some preparation, some on-the-job staff development, but will have less than the traditional professional training. Among these workers are many individuals, mostly women who are utilized for their nurturing, home-making skills so important in residential settings for children and in foster homes. There are also workers who are indigenous to low-income or minority group areas who possess important knowledge for promoting programs and special skills at case finding. (Pearl and Reissman: 1965) In addition there are volunteers of all kinds, including former clients, working in both conventional and atypical agencies. Honorary Probationary Officers alone number approximately 900 in Victoria in 1980 and constitute a major support for in-

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dividuals on probation. All of these workers face, just as professionals do, complex and ambiguous ethical questions.

There is a need for ethical guidelines which cut across all the human services and cover several levels of training and practice. Though it is true that ethical standards are guides to basically good and responsible human relations, it cannot be assumed that even well-intentioned people will have thought through many of the applications to professional and quasi-professional situations and interventions. The principles of practice outlined in a code of ethics provide standards against which such situations can be measured. General human service guidelines would be useful for training purposes in many programs. They could also be communicated to "consumers" of service who would then know what to expect from workers in the human services. In addition, such guidelines could facilitate discussions across professions and fields of service in a search for com-

monly accepted principles and beliefs.

One of the hallmarks of all professions is that members are motivated by a service ethic, namely, that in their practice they will act in the best interests of their clients and the public. Indeed, the main function of a code of ethics, according to Levy (1974), is to lay out the profession's service ethic by a) pledging not to take advantage of the client's lack of technical knowledge, and b) specifying the duties and responsibilities of the professional in relation to clients, colleagues, and the public.

More specifically the apparent purposes of any code of ethics are four-fold. 1) It aims to protect the public from unscrupulous and uninformed practitioners. 2) It provides standards for sanctions and social control of the profession over its membership and, in some instances, a basis for legal action; that is, an ethical code helps the profession "keep its house in order". 3) It serves an educative function, helping trainees to formulate their attitudes and standards and to examine ethical problems of practice. An ethical code is needed for experienced workers as well as trainees to remind professionals of possible infringements of rights or value conflicts and to encourage a periodic review of new and changing applications. Finally, 4) ethical standards also help define professional work and distinguish it from neighborliness and family helping situations. Codes of ethics clarify what trained people do, and suggest sensitive areas of professional practice. The latent purpose of a common ethical code is to indicate to its

members and the public that there is an "acceptable and expected way to practice". Simply having a code of ethics symbolizes this.

If general ethical principles exist, they should help clarify what it is to be ethical in one's work, whether it is at a paraprofessional, community-indigenous or conventional professional level. A code can set forth the responsibilities of practice and establish public accountability. It can also indicate how a profession sees itself and wishes the public to see it. (Howe: 1980). Defining appropriate and expected standards of behaviour to both workers and service-consumers will help ensure judicious services to such consumers. In many situations, the fully trained professional is responsible for the ethical behaviour of those working under his or her direction, and thus may be liable for malpractice suits if a paraprofessional under his or her supervision violates confidentiality or other ethical principles.

There are a number of emerging problems in the changing human service professions which require special attention. For instance, there is the specific problem of accountability for actions taken by clients which had been anticipated or forecast by the client and previously confided to the worker. In addition there are difficult value decisions and problems that arise in such situations as growth or encounter groups, and behaviour modification programs, and in the protection of privacy, the defining of the boundaries of citizen vs. professional roles in community action, in classifying the rights of children, women, prisoners, and the mentally ill, and all manner of subtle manipulation in general. Kelman (1969) argues that any kind of human service intervention involves manipulation, and it is better to recognize and call it that. He states that the best guard against the client being abused by manipulation is awareness and information about what is happening on the part of both worker and client.

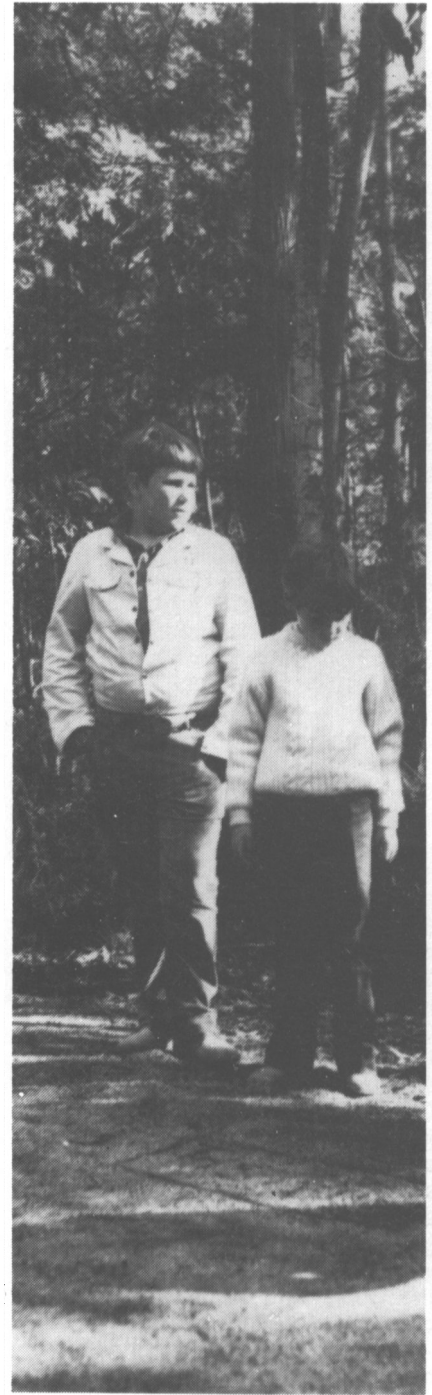
With dwindling resources and funding increasingly tied to accountability, agencies may be tempted to selectively provide service to the "healthier" clients, i.e. clients with greater potential for growth. Needed research projects may well utilize paraprofessionals who have no knowledge of the concept of informed consent. The principles

outlined in a code of ethics assist workers in a very practical way in their day-to-day confrontation with value conflicts.

It would seem to be a responsibility of human service workers to make clients aware of expected ethical standards and their rights as consumers of service. This awareness might be heightened by occasional educational campaigns and by the display of brief statements of ethical standards in offices (such as the short listing at the end of this article). The protection of clients will ultimately, of course, necessitate administrative procedures for handling complaints and grievances.

One question that must be asked is whether a common and useful code of ethics for the human services can be constructed? We believe it can be, and this paper offers a set of principles to start the search for a wide application of standards for the human services. By human services we include those occupations designed to help people with self-defined or socially defined problems, e.g. rehabilitation, corrections, social welfare, mental health, mental retardation and child care. It would also include the service areas generally covered by the helping professions mentioned above. We hope the statement will stimulate others to think about this problem, to examine these guidelines relative to training courses, and to apply them to alleged or potential infringements that arise.

The suggested guidelines for work in the human services have been developed out of study of several ethical codes for two of the helping professions, namely social work (through the 1950 Australian, the 1979 U.S., and the 1976 International Social Work Codes of Ethics respectively); and psychology (through the 1970 Australian and the 1977 U.S. ethical standards for psychologists). (See references at the end of this paper.) We used the statement of the American Psychological Association as the initial framework for our Human Services Guidelines, and modified it extensively and shortened it. Permission for use as a model and the modification was obtained from the association. We started by paraphrasing the principles of conduct and then comparing each with the three social work ethical codes in order to be as inclusive as possible of the central concepts therein. The suggested guidelines follow:



ETHICAL STANDARDS IN THE HUMAN SERVICES

Preamble: It is assumed that human service practitioners believe in the dignity and worth of the individual and the importance of developing organisations and communities which ensure dignity and respect for all. They affirm the mutual responsibilities between each individual and the community of which s/he is a part. They are committed to the development and improvement of personal knowledge and skills, better understanding of human behaviour and the social environment, and the responsibility of society to provide benefits to all its members. Human service practitioners protect the welfare of those who seek their services and ensure that the objectives of service take precedence over self-interest. In the pursuit of these ideals, human service practitioners subscribe to the standards of ethical conduct detailed below in the form of guiding principles.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1. RESPONSIBILITY: *In their commitment to providing service, practitioners in the human services accept responsibility, when it is clearly theirs, for the consequences of their work and make every effort to ensure their services are used appropriately. They recognize their actions affect the lives of others and attempt to be aware of the impact of their actions. Human service practitioners clarify in advance the expectations for service and avoid the dual relationships and conflicts of interest which may limit objectivity, especially in regard to such matters as fees for service, source of salary, ethnic identification and working versus personal relationships.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2. COMPETENCE: *Human service workers are committed to the maintenance of high standards of competence. They recognize the boundaries of their competence, the limitations of their techniques, and*

know when to seek consultation or make referrals. They provide services or use techniques only if they are legitimated and effective. Throughout their careers, human service practitioners take responsibility for building their own substantive knowledge base and for maintaining current information related to the services they render. Practitioners recognize their effectiveness depends in part upon abilities to 1) utilize interactional skills effectively, 2) distinguish between work relationships and personal interests, and 3) put the objectives of service before self-interest.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3. MORAL AND LEGAL STANDARDS: *Human service workers must be aware of the moral, ethical and legal standards established by governmental legislation or practised in the professional community. Their own behaviour is a personal matter but it influences and is influenced by prevailing community standards; they need to be aware of the impact any deviation would have on the quality of their practice. Practitioners should also be aware of the impact of their public behaviour on colleagues — either positively or negatively. It is inappropriate for human service workers to participate in practices inconsistent with moral and legal standards which are harmful to employees or the public, for example, discrimination on the basis of sex, race or social status.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4. PUBLIC STATEMENTS: *Human service practitioners in their work roles may occasionally be expected or required to make public statements providing information about human behaviour and the availability of services. In making such statements they take full account of the limits and uncertainties of present techniques and knowledge. They represent as objectively as possible their qualifications, affiliations, and functions, as well as those of their organisations. In all public statements, human service practitioners clarify whether they are speaking or acting as a private individual or an authorised representative of an organization.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5. CONFIDENTIALITY: *Human service practitioners have a primary obligation to safeguard information about individuals obtained in the course of practice. That is, disclosures of information are restricted to what is necessary, relevant and verifiable. With a few exceptions (such as adoptions, psychological testing and some aspects of teaching), materials in the official record shall be shared with the client who has the right to decide what information may be shared with others, and to be informed of the implications of the shared material. Clients or their authorized representatives (such as children's guardians) should be made aware of the purposes of interviews and the ways information will be used. Sessions with clients are taped or viewed by others only with the client's permission or that of a responsible guardian.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 6. WELFARE OF THE SERVICE CONSUMER: *The human service practitioner respects the integrity of clients and accepts as a primary obligation the welfare of those served, whether individuals, groups or communities, with due regard to the common welfare. Practitioners inform service-consumers as to the purpose and nature of interactions and openly acknowledge the freedom or limitations of choice in regard to participation, when such exists. (Some exceptions would include educational and court settings, as well as adoption procedures as per laws in some states.) The human service worker respects and safeguards the rights of individuals served to a relationship of trust, privacy and confidentiality and to responsible use of all information. The responsibility of the practitioner to protect these rights continues after the working relationship is terminated.*

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 7. COLLEGIAL RELATIONSHIPS: *Human service practitioners act with due regard to the collective well-being of society. They respect their colleagues' rights and obligations as well as those of the institutions or organisations with which they are as-*

sociated. The human service worker acts on the recognition that effective service depends on cooperation among workers with due regard to respective areas of competence, and treats with respect the professional judgment, statements and actions of colleagues. When criticism of colleagues' practice behaviour appears warranted for the well-being of the client, the community, and/or the agency, the human service practitioner makes use of appropriate channels.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 8. UTILISATION OF SPECIALISED PROFESSIONAL TECHNIQUES: In the utilisation of professional and scientific procedures such as tests and medical devices, human service practitioners follow relevant legal, scientific and ethical standards. Only necessary and relevant procedures will be used. Individuals examined or treated, or their legal guardians, have the right to know the results, in individual or his or her dependants. Explanation must be in a language the client can understand. Practitioners have responsibility to obtain a thorough understanding of the techniques and research on which explanations and decisions are based. The protection of the service-consumer and his or her welfare are of primary consideration as is the collective good of society.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 9. COOPERATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: The decision to participate in research activities should be a considered judgment of the human service worker. Investigation is carried out with respect for the people who participate and with concern for their dignity and welfare. Ethically acceptable research begins with the establishment of a clear and fair agreement between the investigator and the participant which clarifies the responsibilities of each. The investigation respects the individual's freedom to decline to participate in or withdraw from research, and makes sure that consent is based on as full information as possible. Information obtained about individuals during the

course of research is kept confidential by the investigator.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 10. GENERAL IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES: The human service practitioner is committed to continued improvement of human services within an overall community perspective. This commitment extends beyond the upgrading of personal competence to the renewal and appropriate extension of service organisations and the general development of the community. The human service worker is committed to making services available for all those in need of them. As employees of an agency, practitioners remain alert to institutional pressures which may run counter to the promotion of human welfare, and recognize the obligation to contribute to the development of humane policies and the highest possible standards of service.

SUMMARY

In summary, it has been suggested that a code of ethics is needed for the human service worker regardless of education, training or qualifications. A code embodies certain standards of behaviour for human service workers in their working relationships with those they serve, with their colleagues, with their employing agency, with others in the helping services, and with the community. Such a code has been set forth for consideration. In addition, a suggested shortened version of the same is proposed for ready visibility and easy access for both workers and service consumers.

SHORT VERSION PROPOSED CODE OF ETHICS FOR HUMAN SERVICE WORKERS

1. **RESPONSIBILITY:** Human service practitioners accept responsibility for consequences of their work. They recognize their actions affect the lives of others. They are alert to potential conflicts of interest and clarify these in advance of service.

2. **COMPETENCE:** Human service practitioners are committed to the maintenance of high standards of skill and knowledge. They take responsibility for their continuing growth and development relative to their practice.

3. **STANDARDS:** Human service practitioners are aware of and conform to moral, ethical and legal standards of practice in their community. They refuse to participate in practices which are inconsistent with high standards or are harmful to the public.

4. **PUBLIC STATEMENTS:** In all public statements human service workers take full account of the limitations of present techniques and knowledge, and clarify whether they are speaking as a private individual or authorized representative of an organization.

5. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** Human service practitioners have a primary obligation to safeguard information about individuals obtained in the course of practice. With some legal exceptions, materials in the official record shall be shared with the client who has the right to decide what may be shared with others.

6. SERVICE-CONSUMER

WELFARE: *The human service worker respects the integrity of those served and safeguards their welfare. They fully inform service-consumers as to the purpose and nature of all interaction and openly acknowledge the freedom of choice in regard to participation.*

7. COLLEGIAL RELATIONS:

Human service practitioners act with due regard to the needs and feelings of colleagues, and respect their rights, obligations, skills and judgment.

8. USE OF SPECIALIZED TECHNIQUES:

In the use of tests and scientific, medical and other techniques, human service practitioners follow legal, scientific and ethical standards. Only needed and relevant procedures will be used. Users of specialized techniques protect security, but not at the expense of the client's right to understand the basis for decisions in understandable language.

9. RESEARCH:

Research activities are carried out with respect for those who participate. Ethical research involves the establishment of a clear and fair agreement which clarifies the responsibilities of each, respects the individual's right to decline or withdraw, and makes sure consent is based on as full and relevant information as possible.

10. IMPROVEMENT OF SERVICES:

Human service workers are committed to a continuing review of practices and policies aimed at upgrading, extending and facilitating services for all who need them. ●

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FOOTNOTE:

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