

CHARLESTON/DORCHESTER COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

Policy regarding:

Employee Relations with Clients (Consumers) of the Center

Purpose:

It is the purpose of this directive to present general guidelines regarding acceptable employee-client relationships. The guidelines are general because it is impossible to specify all possible employee-client types of interaction. This Center policy is in addition to other SCDMH directives such as (but not limited to) Directive 780-94: PROHIBITED ABUSIVE, NEGLECTFUL AND EXPLOITATIVE CONDUCT TOWARD PATIENTS AND CLIENTS and the Center's policy regarding "Acceptance of Gifts to Staff from Center Clients."

Policy:

The primary function and responsibility of employees of the C/DCMHC is to provide services and support to persons experiencing mental and emotional difficulties. Actions by employees in regards to patients should be guided by the defined treatment needs of any individual patient and by the job description of the employee. Relationships outside these defined roles are inappropriate and may be cause for disciplinary action by the Center.

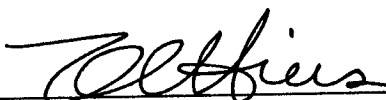
The unique relationship between employees of a mental health center and the clients (consumers) of that Center is one requiring unusual cautions, restraints, and prohibitions. The relationship is by definition not an "equal" one, for the employee is the identified professional caregiver and often has access to highly confidential information about the client (but not vice versa). The client is often vulnerable because of a variety of physical, emotional, and environmental stresses. The inequities and the potential for distortion, exploitation, and harm associated with the "professional-client" relationship are subjects which have received considerable attention in the mental health field as well as the medical field in general. The following guidelines are created out of a concern for the potential harm to clients that the aforementioned inequities may present if not handled appropriately.

1. Employee-client relationships should be professional and determined by the client's treatment needs, and all interactions should be documented in the client's medical record.
2. Deliberate contact by a Center employee with a Center client in a context other than a Center-approved service, program, or activity is inappropriate. This includes telephone calls.
3. Friendships, social relationships, business relationships, and romantic and sexual relationships between Center employees and Center clients are inappropriate and prohibited. This prohibition applies to all clients of the Center whether or not the employee has a direct work-related relationship with the client.

4. Where an ongoing personal relationship existed before one of the parties (client or employee) became associated with the Center, it is the responsibility of the employee to inform his/her supervisor in writing of the nature of that current relationship. There shall be no assignment of direct therapist or case manager involvement with a client with whom there is a continuing personal relationship, and that employee shall not have access to the client's medical record.
5. In any situation where there is employee-client contact that is outside a Center-related context, the employee is required to immediately report this contact in writing to his/her supervisor as well as document such contact in the client's medical record. (This does not include one-time, random or unavoidable episodes such as seeing and speaking to a client at the grocery store, church or other public place. However, even then, confidentiality is a consideration, and a rule of thumb is to let the client govern the nature of the "random contact.") In all cases where it may seem questionable whether the supervisor should be notified, such notification shall occur.
6. When a person ceases to be an active client (consumer) of the Center, staff persons shall nevertheless not establish personal relationships with said former clients for a period of two years.
7. In cases where a child is the identified client of the Mental Health Center, these same guidelines shall apply to the adult caregivers of the child, although the adult may not be the identified client.
8. Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted as endorsing non-compliance with the more restrictive requirements imposed by a number of professional and licensing organizations with which many staff persons are associated.

Failure to comply with these guidelines may result in disciplinary action which may include a written warning, suspension, or termination depending on the circumstances and severity of the violation.

Approved by:



Thomas G. Hiers, Ph.D.,
Executive Director, C/DCMHC

1-19-96
Date

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