

Decision of the Psychology Board of Australia

Performance and Professional Standards Panel Hearing

Jurisdiction: Victoria

Date of hearing and decision: 21 May 2012

Classification of Notification:

Boundary violation – Other inappropriate relationship (non-sexual)

Documentation – Health record – inappropriate maintenance or disposal

Allegations were made by a woman whose husband had consulted a psychologist. She alleged that the husband and psychologist had formed a personal relationship and that this contributed to the breakup of the woman's marriage.

Allegations

The psychologist faced allegations that after the formal termination of the professional relationship, the husband and psychologist continued to maintain an informal therapeutic relationship (consisting of telephone communications with the husband in relation to personal issues arising out the counselling sessions) for a two-year period. It was alleged that the psychologist breached professional boundaries by commencing a personal relationship with a former patient and that she failed to make and keep adequate records of the psychological services provided to the patient during the period.

Finding

The Panel found that the psychologist's behaviour constituted unprofessional conduct because she had maintained an informal therapeutic relationship after terminating treatment, had behaved in a manner that could be construed as both acting as a therapist and as a friend, and because the social contact after the professional relationship was terminated was inappropriate. Further, the Panel found that the psychologist's clinical records were barely adequate. There was a lack of treatment planning, case formulation, detail regarding interventions and associated responses. It was clear that the psychologist had not kept her appointment diary for the required seven-year period.

Determination

The Panel determined to reprimand the psychologist for unprofessional conduct and imposed the following conditions on her registration

- (a) the psychologist was to undertake weekly supervision of her clinical practice for one year to focus on boundary issues, appropriate professional practice specifically in relation to relationship issues and clinical record keeping
- (b) the psychologist was to provide a report to the Board every six months addressing the contents and progress of supervision and the supervisor was to provide a report to the Board on the supervision and whether the psychologist met the learning objectives and
- (c) the psychologist was to undertake psychotherapeutic treatment with an appropriately qualified registered psychologist or psychiatrist and attend at a frequency and for a duration

recommended by the treating practitioner. The Board was to be advised of the name of the treating practitioner who was to provide reports to the Board.