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Notice of Psychologists' Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY.

I. Uses and Disclosures for Treatment, Payment, and Health Care Operations

I may *use* or *disclose* your *protected health information (PHI)*, for *treatment, payment, and health care operations* purposes with your *consent*. To help clarify these terms, here are some definitions:

- “*PHI*” refers to information in your health record that could identify you.
- “*Treatment, Payment and Health Care Operations*”
 - *Treatment* is when I provide, coordinate or manage your health care and other services related to your health care. An example of treatment would be when I consult with another health care provider, such as your family physician or another psychologist.
 - *Payment* is when I obtain reimbursement for your healthcare. Examples of payment are when I disclose your PHI to your health insurer to obtain reimbursement for your health care or to determine eligibility or coverage.
 - *Health Care Operations* are activities that relate to the performance and operation of my practice. Examples of health care operations are quality assessment and improvement activities, business-related matters such as audits and administrative services, and case management and care coordination.
- “*Use*” applies only to activities within my [office, clinic, practice group, etc.] such as sharing, employing, applying, utilizing, examining, and analyzing information that identifies you.
- “*Disclosure*” applies to activities outside of my [office, clinic, practice group, etc.], such as releasing, transferring, or providing access to information about you to other parties.

II. Uses and Disclosures Requiring Authorization

I may use or disclose PHI for purposes outside of treatment, payment, and health care operations when your appropriate authorization is obtained. An “*authorization*” is written permission above and beyond the general consent that permits only specific disclosures. In those instances when I am asked for information for purposes outside of treatment, payment and health care operations, I will obtain an authorization from you before releasing this information. I will also need to obtain an authorization before releasing your psychotherapy notes. “*Psychotherapy notes*” are notes I have made about our conversation during a private, group, joint, or family counseling session, which I may keep separate from the rest of your medical record. These notes may be given a greater degree of protection than PHI.

You may revoke all such authorizations (of PHI or psychotherapy notes) at any time, provided each revocation is in writing. You may not revoke an authorization to the extent that (1) I have relied on that authorization; or (2) if the authorization was obtained as a condition of obtaining insurance coverage, and the law provides the insurer the right to contest the claim under the policy.

III. Uses and Disclosures with Neither Consent nor Authorization

I may use or disclose PHI without your consent or authorization in the following circumstances:

- **Child Abuse:** When in my professional capacity, I have received information which gives me reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect, I must report such to the county Department of Social Services, or to a law enforcement agency in the county where the child resides or is found. If I have received information in my professional capacity which gives me reason to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by acts or omissions that would be child abuse or neglect if committed by a parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, but I believe that the act or omission was committed by a person other than the parent, guardian, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, I must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency.
- **Adult and Domestic Abuse:** If I have reason to believe that a vulnerable adult has been or is likely to be abused, neglected, or exploited, I must report the incident within 24 hours or the next business day to the Adult Protective Services Program. I may also report directly to law enforcement personnel.
- **Health Oversight:** The South Carolina Board of Examiners in Psychology has the power, if necessary, to subpoena my records. I am then required to submit to them those records relevant to their inquiry.
- **Judicial or administrative proceedings:** If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made about the professional services I provided you or the records thereof, such information is privileged under state law, and I will not release information without your written consent or a court order. The privilege does not apply when you are being evaluated for a third party or where the evaluation is court ordered. You will be informed in advance if this is the case.
- **Serious Threat to Health or Safety:** If you communicate to me the intention to commit a crime or harm yourself, I may disclose confidential information when I judge that disclosure is necessary to protect against a clear and substantial risk of imminent serious harm being inflicted by you on yourself or another person. In this situation, I must limit disclosure of the otherwise confidential information to only those persons and only that content which would be consistent with the standards of the profession in addressing such problems.
- **Workers' Compensation:** If you file a workers' compensation claim, I am required by law to provide all existing information compiled by me pertaining to the claim to your employer, the insurance carrier, their attorneys, the South Carolina Worker's Compensation Commission, or you.

IV. Patient's Rights and Psychologist's Duties

Patient's Rights:

- *Right to Request Restrictions* You have the right to request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of protected health information about you. However, I am not required to agree to a restriction you request.

- *Right to Receive Confidential Communications by Alternative Means and at Alternative Locations* – You have the right to request and receive confidential communications of PHI by alternative means and at alternative locations. (For example, you may not want a family member to know that you are seeing me. Upon your request, I will send your bills to another address.)
- *Right to Inspect and Copy* – You have the right to inspect or obtain a copy (or both) of PHI in my mental health and billing records used to make decisions about you for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. I may deny your access to PHI under certain circumstances, but in some cases you may have this decision reviewed. On your request, I will discuss with you the details of the request and denial process.
- *Right to Amend* – You have the right to request an amendment of PHI for as long as the PHI is maintained in the record. I may deny your request. On your request, I will discuss with you the details of the amendment process.
- *Right to an Accounting* – You generally have the right to receive an accounting of disclosures of PHI regarding you. On your request, I will discuss with you the details of the accounting process.
- *Right to a Paper Copy* – You have the right to obtain a paper copy of the notice from me upon request, even if you have agreed to receive the notice electronically

Psychologist's Duties:

- I am required by law to maintain the privacy of PHI and to provide you with a notice of my legal duties and privacy practices with respect to PHI.
- I reserve the right to change the privacy policies and practices described in this notice. Unless I notify you of such changes, however, I am required to abide by the terms currently in effect.
- If I revise my policies and procedures, I will post a notice in my office or waiting room to inform you of this.

V. Questions and Complaints

If you have questions about this notice, disagree with a decision I make about access to your records, or have other concerns about your privacy rights, you may discuss this with me in person. If you believe that your privacy rights have been violated and wish to file a complaint with me, you may send your written complaint to me at my office address. You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. I can provide you with the appropriate address upon request. You have specific rights under the Privacy Rule. I will not retaliate against you for exercising your right to file a complaint.

VI. Effective Date, Restrictions and Changes to Privacy Policy

This notice will go into effect on April 14, 2003. I believe for the therapy process to be most effective, particularly for couples and children, that it is imperative that the process include a safe, confidential atmosphere. Therefore, it is my general policy to ask you to agree in advance not to request my testimony in any legal proceedings unless we have mutually agreed to this in advance of therapy starting or unless one of the above exceptions occur.

If you are under 17 years old, please be aware that your parents/guardian need to provide consent for you to see me. Also, the law may provide them with the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents/guardian that they respect the

confidential nature of our relationship and of your records. I will provide them only with general information on how your treatment is progressing unless I feel that there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or another, in which case I will notify them of my concerns. Often there will be issues which I think would be best discussed in a family therapy session. I will always discuss these matters with you first and will do my best to resolve any objections you may have about what I would like to discuss.

I reserve the right to change the terms of this notice and to make the new notice provisions effective for all PHI that I maintain. I will provide you with a revised notice by posting this in my office or waiting room.

Revised August 2015