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Chapter 1 Introduction

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According to Spinelli, throughout life the many dilemmas we are confronted with are not principally concerned with questions of right versus wrong but about the choices we make between actions, that in themselves, contain elements of both “right” and “wrong” (Spinelli 1994;124 cited by Gilbert & Evans 2000, ;131).

We are delighted to be writing an introduction to the second edition of the Handbook of Professional, Ethical and Research Practice. We hope that this book will provide an overview of the major professional, ethical and research practice issues that a psychologist, counsellor or therapist ¹may need to consider in their therapeutic career. We believe that ethical, professional and research decision-making and practices need to be kept at the forefront of every therapist’s repertoire, particularly in the constantly changing environment in which we live. Professional, ethical and research practice issues form the backbone of therapeutic decision-making and good practice as well as being central to the curriculum requirements for all the major professional counselling and psychology organisations worldwide. This is to ensure that clients or service users receive the best possible service which follows best ethical, professional and research decision making and that therapists are adhering to all aspects of best practice as well as working within appropriate guidelines.

There have been many developments since the first edition was published in 2005 and we have reflected and accommodated these. Changes to the environment include those in technology, the socio-political context and legislation; these have resonated around the world. Changes have included a move towards a more business driven model in many services including the British National Health Service (NHS) and therapists may find

¹ We will use the term therapists to apply to psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors throughout the introduction

themselves trying to balance the demands of a target driven service with fewer resources and a desire to provide an excellent services for clients/service users. In addition, regulatory arrangements have changed in various countries. For all therapist, an emphasis on time limited therapy, revised commissioning arrangements and new roles within the various professions have all brought changes. Whilst technological advances, for example the wide spread use of a range of social media have led to a range of new challenges for therapeutic practitioners. Each chapter has therefore been written to reflect where necessary the current environment and recent developments in context, practice and research.

The chapter authors are all respected members of one of the professional bodies representing therapists and psychologists. We have also added several new chapters to this edition. These include chapters on the role of social media in therapeutic practice, trainee perspectives on professional and ethical practice as well as a chapter dealing with potential professional and ethical clinical scenarios.

Professional, ethical and research practices form a powerful, compelling and vibrant arena. Changes in legislation, professional and ethical guidelines in addition to changing research and practice requirements may all lead to incremental and paradigm shifts. In addition, changing professional codes of practice, cultural traditions and expectations, personal belief systems as well as the demands of clinical governance, lifelong learning and statutory registration will also impact upon professional, ethical and research practice. As such, we believe that the challenges in this area of practice are one of the things that make it an interesting and challenging one.

The juxtaposition of the personal and professional are central to professional ethical and research practice. We believe that continuing professional development is an essential requirement of professionalism and is another arena where further consideration of professional, ethical and research dilemmas can be undertaken.

Throughout this book particular emphasis is placed in each chapter on the current codes of practice and ethical principles underpinning safe ethical practice and the implications for practitioners. Therefore each author was asked to focus on the particular professional and

ethical issues in his or her area of expertise and the challenges they present in clinical practice. The importance of considering diversity is also paramount and this theme runs throughout the book. Different audiences may be guided by different ethical codes, cultures of practice and training among which there are many similarities and some differences. Notwithstanding this, the importance of ethical awareness and practice for all therapists or practitioners working in therapeutic environments shares a common basis. Given the boundaries of this book it was not feasible to cover all eventualities related to professional and ethical practice or the contexts in which they occur. However, this book aims to foster the professional judgement of the reader, who is required to manage the often complex and challenging ethical issues unique to each situation. The latter is illustrated throughout the various clinical case examples in the respective chapters.

The book is divided into five sections. The authors represent different constituencies, including psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists as well as a range of theoretical orientations. Section One is entitled 'Professional Practice and Ethical Considerations' which describes the development and monitoring of professional ethics in contemporary society drawing upon incidences where professional and ethical considerations appear to have been largely ignored by hospital staff, as detailed using the findings of the Francis report (2013) as a comparator and consider what we as therapists might learn from them. The following chapters address issues concerning the concept of professional contracts with and within organisations and how they can be negotiated to create healthier relationships and more positive working environments. The final chapter in this section discusses the person in ethical-decision making and the varying degrees of discomfort that can arise between ethical principles and personal values as well as its impact on the therapeutic work.

The first two chapters in section two 'Legal Considerations and Responsibilities' provide a comprehensive overview of the professional responsibilities as they relates to data protection, client confidentiality and the legal context of therapy. The following chapters focus on specific professional and legal considerations and responsibilities relating to the important areas of note keeping and record keeping. The next chapter is on writing a report for use in court reports and appearing as an expert witness. While section three 'Clinical Considerations and Responsibilities' covers specific areas and the accompanying professional

and ethical challenges that apply to the practice of therapy including managing referrals, dealing with complaints, fitness to practice, suicide risk, working in a multidisciplinary team in a health care setting and the increasing role of social media. The penultimate section 'Working with Difference – Professional Practice and Ethical considerations' focuses on issues of working with diversity including age, sexual orientation, disability and race as well as detailing the importance of considering such issues in every area of our clinical and research practice and not merely in the consulting room. The final section 'Research, Supervision and Training' highlights the importance of research and the challenges of undertaking research in clinical practice. The current debate surrounding evidence-based practice is also discussed. An examination of personal therapy, the teaching and learning about ethics and professional practice from trainees' and tutors' perspectives, as well as a new chapter which considers the concept of the wounded healer. Next is a chapter on clinical supervision which is one of the key components in the process of becoming a psychologist, counsellor and psychotherapist. The final chapter presents a range of clinical scenarios which raise a range of professional and ethical issues and which may be encountered by any therapist. Each scenario is followed by a range of questions for consideration either alone or within a training or supervision group.

In conclusion, as editors we hope the reflective questions at the end of each chapter will facilitate further discussion, reflection and learning concerning the many complex and challenging professional, ethical and research dilemmas each therapist is confronted within a fast moving therapeutic environment.

References

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