

Laura Palmer, Ph.D., M.S.C.P., A.B.P.P., & Associates
Board Certified in Counseling Psychology
Licensed Psychologist, NJ #3534
Pediatric and Adolescent Neuropsychology
37 Kings Road, Ste. 102
Madison, New Jersey 07940
(973) 377-7705 or (973) 727-5475
Fax: (973) 377-7792
E-Mail: psych@drlaurapalmer.org

**PSYCHOTHERAPIST-PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT
NEW JERSEY**

Welcome to my practice. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about my professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides new privacy protections and new patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that I provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment and health care operations. The law requires that I obtain your signature acknowledging that I have provided you with this information at the end of this session.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing difficult aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise.

MEETINGS

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 1-3 sessions. During this time, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If

psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 55-minute session (one appointment hour of 55 minutes duration) per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. **Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours [1 day] advance notice of cancellation [unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control]. It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions.** [If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment.]

PROFESSIONAL FEES

My hourly fee is \$225.00. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 5 minutes, consulting with other professionals with your permission, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me.

CONTACTING ME

Due to my work schedule, I am often not immediately available by telephone. While I am usually in my office between 10 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. Monday - Friday, I do not answer the phone when I am with a patient. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by voice mail that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call within 24 hours of the day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist. In most situations, I can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written Authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:

- I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't

object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together. I will note all consultations in your Clinical Record (which is called "PHI" in my Notice of Psychologist's Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).

- You should be aware that I practice with other mental health professionals and that I employ administrative staff. In most cases, I need to share protected information with these individuals for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.

There are some situations where I am permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or Authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your diagnosis and treatment, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. I cannot provide any information without your (or your legal representative's) written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order me to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, I may be required to provide it for them.
- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against me, I may disclose relevant information regarding that patient in order to defend myself.
- If a patient files a worker's compensation claim related to the services I am providing, I may, upon appropriate request, disclose protected information to others authorized to receive it by the workers' compensation law.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take actions, which I believe are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and I may have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. These situations are unusual in my practice.

- If I have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subject to abuse, the law requires that I must report it to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- If I have reasonable cause to believe that a vulnerable adult is the subject of abuse, neglect or exploitation, and I believe that the disclosure is necessary to prevent serious harm to the patient or other potential victims, I may report the information to the county adult protective services provider. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- If a patient communicates a threat, or if I believe the patient presents a threat of imminent serious physical violence against a readily identifiable individual or the public, I may be required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient.
- If I believe the patient presents a threat of imminent serious physical harm to him/herself, I may be required to take protective actions. These actions may include contacting the police or others who could assist in protecting the patient or seeking hospitalization for the patient.

If such a situation arises, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and I will limit my disclosure to what is necessary.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep Protected Health Information about you in your Clinical Record. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and/or others or when another individual (other than another health care provider) is referenced and I believe disclosing that information puts the other person at risk of substantial harm, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record, if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, I recommend that you initially review them in my presence, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most situations, I am allowed to charge a copying fee of \$3.00 per page (and for certain other expenses). If I refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right of review, which I will discuss with you upon request.

PATIENT RIGHTS

HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Records and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that I amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Records is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about my policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to a paper copy of this Agreement, the attached Notice form, and my privacy policies and procedures. I am happy to discuss any of these rights with you.

MINORS & PARENTS

Patients under 14 years of age who are not emancipated and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child's treatment records unless I decide that such access is likely to injure the child, or we agree otherwise. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is sometimes my policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up their access to their child's records. If they agree, during treatment, I will provide them only with general information about the progress of the child's treatment, and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. I will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's Authorization, unless I feel that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, I will notify the parents of my concern. Before giving parents any information, I will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections he/she may have.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services.

You should also be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that I provide it with information relevant to the services that I provide to you. An insurance company or other third-party payor regulated under New Jersey law may request that the patient authorize the psychologist to disclose certain confidential information to the third-party payor in order to obtain benefits, *only if* the disclosure is pursuant to a valid authorization (see below) and the information is limited to:

- 1) Administrative information (i.e., patient's name, age, sex, address, educational status, identifying number, date of onset of difficulty, date of initial consultation, dates and character of sessions (individual or group), and fees);
- 2) Diagnostic information (i.e., therapeutic characterizations as found in the APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM III), or other professionally recognized diagnostic manual);
- 3) The patient's status (voluntary or involuntary; inpatient or outpatient);
- 4) The reason for continuing psychological services, limited to an assessment of the patient's current levels of functioning and distress (both described by terms of mild, moderate, severe or extreme); and
- 5) A prognosis, limited to the estimated minimal time during which treatment might continue.

A valid authorization under this statute shall:

- 1) be in writing;
- 2) specify the nature of the information to be disclosed, the person authorized to disclose the information, to whom the information may be disclosed, the specific purposes for which the information may be used, both at the time of disclosure and at any time in the future;
- 3) specify that the patient is aware of the his or her right to confidential communications under psychologist-patient privilege;
- 4) be signed by the patient, or the person authorizing disclosure (e.g., the patient's parent, guardian or legal representative); and
- 5) contain the date that the authorization was signed.

Any authorization executed pursuant to this statute is valid for one year from the date the authorization is signed and applies only to the disclosure of information available on the date the authorization is signed.

If the third-party payor has reasonable cause to believe that the psychological treatment in question may be neither usual, customary nor reasonable, the third-party payor may request, in writing, and compensate reasonably for, an independent review of such treatment by an independent review committee.

You should be aware that if your health benefits are provided by a self-insured employee benefit plan or other arrangement regulated by the federal ERISA statute, such plan will have considerably more access to information in your Clinical Record. They will not have access to your Psychotherapy Notes. If you have any question about the nature of your health benefits, you should contact the group that provides the benefits for you.

This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end your sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above [unless prohibited by contract].

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Name: Please print first and last name

Date:

Signature:

Date:

Informing Psychologist Signature

Date: