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Returning Veterans Project
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Professional Ethics and the Treatment of Trauma

Trauma Informed Care and Trauma Specific Services

Core Ethical Principles and Virtues

Ethical Decision Making

Competence

Informed Consent and Patient Safety

Privacy & Confidentiality

Professional Boundaries

Vicarious Traumatization and Burnout

Self-reflection and Self-care for Mental Health Professionals

Learning Objectives

- 1) Participant will increase knowledge of current developments in ethics, laws and practice guidelines.
- 2) Participant can describe common ethical challenges in treating traumatized individuals.
- 3) Participant will apply ethical principles and decision-making models to case vignettes.
- 4) Participant will be able to identify potential ethical issues in multiple role relationships.
- 5) Participant will understand risks for burnout and identify three strategies for self-care.

VIGNETTE #1

Barbara White, Ph.D. (RVP) worked with Mark on readjustment issues after two deployments that created intense strain in his marriage. He completed therapy when "things were better at home". A year later his wife has a miscarriage. He is not sleeping and having nightmares about losses he experienced while on active duty.

Mark sees in the RVP provider directory that Dr. White is not taking new clients. He doesn't want to start over with a new therapist, so he contacts Dr. White and offers to use his insurance so he can see her again.

Barbara listens to the voice mail and is uncertain how to respond. She already has two pro bono clients and yet she knows Mark is currently in distress.

What does she need to consider?

VIGNETTE #2

Laura Jones, MSW is a recently licensed social worker who joined RVP in order to give back to the community, an important value of her graduate program. She begins work with Carol, a female vet who has had trouble maintaining employment due to depression, anxiety and poor concentration. In her last job, Carol describes an uncomfortable situation with her male supervisor who would make inappropriate comments about her body.

After two months of unemployment Carol's depression is worsening, and she discloses that she is experiencing intrusive thoughts and nightmares about a sexual assault she experienced while working in a medical unit in Iraq. Laura becomes anxious in session hearing about Carol's assault, which triggers some of her own past trauma experience with a date rape in college. Laura has not had any specific training in military sexual trauma, and is feeling overwhelmed.

What ethical issues do you see? What steps should she consider next?

VIGNETTE #3

Dylan sees Bob Smith, LPC for PTSD issues related to injuries in Afghanistan when his truck drove over an IED. He is also receiving massage treatment from Mary Jones, LMT for chronic pain.

Dylan expresses appreciation for the benefits of the massage, which helps manage his pain. He feels comfortable talking to Mary and confides in her that he has been struggling with intense depression and nightmares recently, as his anniversary of being wounded is coming up.

Mary is concerned and encourages Dylan to talk about these issues with his psychotherapist. Dylan says he feels more comfortable telling her about his feelings since she is a woman and would understand without judging him.