
Special Issues in Ethical and Legal Issues in Counselling

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The Latin word *communis*, meaning "in common," underlies the words "communicate" and "community." The shared root is reflected not only in their similar spelling but also in their deeper meaning, as communication is necessary in building a sense of community. This special issue on ethical and legal issues in counselling reflects the interplay between communication and community in that, as we discuss topics of concern to us all, we can strengthen our shared sense of professional identity and connection.

Our professional identity, including our consensus on what constitutes appropriate counsellor behaviour, provides the public and our clients with an identifiable professional "face." But, whose face do they see? Any community, including a professional community, consists of many members with both shared and divergent points of view. Consequently, our professional identity consists of a delicate and constantly evolving balance between those beliefs or worldviews that are shared by all members and those that represent areas of difference. If we hope to maintain a strong, shared professional identity, we need open discussion and debate on areas of disagreement.

Ethical issues in counselling fall squarely within the parameters of what needs to be debated in order to evolve and mature as a profession. Legal issues, such as counsellor regulation or child-abuse reporting, are areas where our profession needs to participate in the public debate on possible changes to current law. The four invited articles in this issue all address limitations or unanswered questions in our current standards, practices or systems of organization. Each reflects the reality that, because the societal context of our work continues to change, our ethics codes and professional structures also need to change. This boundary between "what is" and "what needs to be" represents the creative edge where new ideas can arise; however, that same edge can also trip us up. The instruction in ethics that we received during our counsellor training may not be consistent with the current ethics code, particularly for those of us who have been in practice for some time. At the same time, the need to maintain competence through continuing education is the first ethical standard listed in the Guidelines for Ethical Behavior (CGCA, 1989). While some may perceive revisions to our ethics code as "changing the rules," and experience annoyance at the need to familiarize oneself with how standards are being applied in new settings, it is important to remember that periodic revisions are what keep our codes relevant to

current practice. Our current code was revised less than a decade ago; while its breadth makes it highly relevant to many new areas of practice, some gaps have begun to appear.

In this issue, each author draws our attention to areas that are not well covered by our current code, or by those of other mental health professions. Schank illuminates the ambiguity inherent in the rural counsellor's practice; McCormick calls for heightened cultural awareness in our work with Native clients; Stuart suggests extensions of our ethical code to cover newer research methodologies; Handelsman and Uhlemann examine possible consequences of introducing counsellor regulation. The areas addressed by these articles all require further debate before we can reach a consensus on our preferred course of action. I appreciate the contribution that the authors have made to our ongoing examination of ethical and professional questions and hope this special issue catalyzes further conversation. When you finish "listening" to the authors of these contributions, consider submitting a manuscript that conveys your own perceptions and concerns. . . . our professional community can only benefit from continuing the conversation.

References

- Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association, 1989. Guidelines for ethical behaviour. Ottawa: Author.