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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 such as sharing, employing, applying, utilizing, examining, and analyzing information that identifies you.
- “Disclosure” applies to activities outside of my office, 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 psychotherapy notes. "Psychotherapy notes" are notes I have made about our conversation during a private, group, joint, or family counseling session, which I have kept separate from the rest of your medical record. These notes are 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.

I will also obtain an authorization from you before using or disclosing PHI in a way that is not described in this Notice.

### **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 and Neglect:** If I have reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected, I am required by law to report such information to the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) within 24 hours of the time information regarding the suspected abuse or neglect was first received or observed.
- **Adult Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation:** If I have reasonable cause to believe that a vulnerable adult has been abused, neglected, or exploited, I am required by law to report or cause a report to be made to Adult Protective Services within 48 hours of discovering the potential abuse, neglect, and/or exploitation.
- **Health Oversight:** If I receive a subpoena for records from the Vermont Board of Psychological Examiners in relation to a disciplinary action, I must submit such records to the Board.
- **Judicial or administrative proceedings:** If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information about the professional services that I have provided you and/or the records thereof, such information is privileged under state law, and I must not release this information without written authorization from you or your legally appointed representative, or a court order. This privilege does not apply when you are being evaluated for a third party or where the evaluation is court ordered. I will inform you in advance if this is the case.
- **Serious Threat to Health or Safety:** If I know that you pose a serious risk of danger to an identifiable victim, I am required by law to exercise reasonable care to protect such victim. This may include disclosing your relevant confidential information to those people necessary to address the problem. Also, I may disclose your confidential information if I judge disclosure is necessary to protect against a clear and substantial risk of imminent serious harm being inflicted by you on yourself or another person.

• **Other Disclosures** Allowed without your Consent or Authorization: When the use and disclosure without your consent or authorization is allowed under other sections of Section 164.512 of the Privacy Rule and the state's confidentiality law. This includes narrowly-defined disclosures to law enforcement agencies, to a health oversight agency (such as HHS or state department of health), to a coroner or medical examiner, for public health purposes related to disease or FDA-regulated products, or for specialized government functions such as fitness for military duties, eligibility for VA benefits, and national security and intelligence.

#### **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 Restrict Disclosures When You Have Paid for Your Care Out-of-Pocket** – You have the right to restrict certain disclosures of PHI to a health plan when you pay out-of-pocket in full for my services.
- **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. On your request, I will discuss with you the details of the request 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.
- **Right to be Notified if There is a Breach of Your Unsecured PHI** – You have the right to be notified if: a) there is a breach (a use or disclosure of your PHI in violation of the HIPAA Privacy Rule) involving your PHI; b) that PHI has not been encrypted to government standards; and my risk assessment fails to determine that there is a low probability that your PHI has been compromised.

**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.

**V. Complaints**

If you are concerned that I have violated your privacy rights, or you disagree with a decision I made about access to your records, you may contact the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation (802-828-1505).

You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The office listed above can provide you with the appropriate address upon request.

**VI. Effective Date, Restrictions and Changes to Privacy Policy**

This notice will go into effect on April 14, 2003. Prior to the effective date, I will continue to protect your health information as required by applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and policies.

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.

Effective 9/23/2013, this privacy notice was modified to comply with the HITECH modifications to the Privacy Rule and other rules under HIPAA (Final Omnibus Rule).