

Decision of the Psychology Board of Australia

Performance and Professional Standards Panel

Jurisdiction: Victoria

Date of Hearing: 22 August 2011

Date of Decision: 29 November 2011

Classification of Notification:

Clinical Care – Delayed or inadequate or inappropriate referral

Communication – Failure to communicate openly, honestly, and effectively

The psychologist had seen the client (a minor) about 8-10 times in relation to bullying and learning difficulties at school. The sessions were interrupted for several weeks due to family events. During that period the psychologist left the practice without contacting the client or his mother. The psychologist who took over the minor's case had difficulty as there was no documentation in the minor's file or any handover notes or discussions.

Allegations

The psychologist faced allegations that she failed to appropriately terminate her professional relationship with her client by failing to make reasonable arrangement for the continuity of psychological services. She did not advise the client of the termination of services or make arrangements for him to continue with another practitioner. By failing to make reasonable arrangements she did not ensure a proper handover of the client's file.

Finding

The Panel found that the psychologist did not demonstrate any understanding of the relational issues involved in the termination of the psychological treatment and therapeutic relationship. It found she did not display any understanding of the issues of abruptly terminating contact with a patient, especially one whose family had just experienced a death. Further, the psychologist offered no explanation to the patient or his mother and had left negotiations for ongoing care in the hands of a third party. The psychologist therefore had no capacity to monitor the progress of arrangements or determine if the needs of the client were being met.

On the basis of those findings, the Panel decided that the psychologist had behaved in a way that constituted unsatisfactory professional performance.

Determination

The Panel determined to reprimand the psychologist and imposed a condition on her registration requiring her to undertake a period of supervised practice by a psychologist approved by the Board. The supervision should focus on record keeping, consent, termination, managing professional relationship and relevant legislations about health records.

The fortnightly supervision was to take place for two years. The supervisor was to provide reports to the Board every six months from the commencement of the supervision, detailing the supervision and

whether the practitioner had met the learning objectives to a level expected of a registered psychologist. The psychologist was to provide reports to the Board every six months to address the specific learning objectives defined by the Panel and demonstrate how the supervision changed her practice. The costs of the supervision were to be met by the psychologist.