

PSYCHOLOGIST - PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT
STEVEN D. NICHOLS, PH.D.

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 new 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 Notice, which is attached to this Agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires that I obtain your signature acknowledging that I have provided you with this information. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully before our next session. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures at that time. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on me unless I have taken action in reliance on it; if there are obligations imposed on me by your health insurer in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES: Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home. Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant 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. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

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. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

PSYCHOTHERAPY MEETINGS: I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 2 to 4 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 45-minute session (one appointment/session equals 45 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 48 hours 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 professional fee for psychotherapy is \$110 for an initial evaluation and

\$110 for 45-minute psychotherapy sessions. 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 10 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. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for all of my professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$150 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding. For clients who are seeking a specific type of psychological evaluation (e.g., learning disability, ADHD, personality/psychological evaluations) my fee is \$125 per hour of test administration, interpretation, and reporting. If you are here for a specific type of evaluation, I will also provide you with detailed information regarding my additional policy on such evaluations (please read and sign form titled: *LD and ADHD Evaluations*).

CONTACTING ME: I conduct my private practice on Monday through Friday weekdays and evenings as well as every other Saturday. Due to my work schedule, I am often not immediately available by telephone (513-321-7900). However, during office hours, I check my work phone regularly for voicemails and emergencies. I will make every effort to return your call on the same 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. After hours, the same number will connect you to the after-hours emergency number. In case of an emergency or personal crisis situation, you can call my emergency line at 513-312-2203. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you

can't wait for me to return your call, contact 911 or go to the nearest hospital 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 (i.e., billing services). In most cases, I need to share protected information with these individuals for administrative purposes, such as 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.

- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in this Agreement.

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 evaluation, diagnosis or treatment, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. I cannot provide any information without your (or your personal or 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, the patient must execute a release so that I may release the information, records or reports relevant to the claim.

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 know or have reason to suspect that a child under 18 years of age or a mentally retarded, developmentally disabled, or

physically impaired child under 21 years of age has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of the child, the law requires that I file a report with the appropriate government agency, usually the Public Children Services Agency. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.

- If I have reasonable cause to believe that an adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited, or is in a condition which is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the law requires that I report such belief to the county Department of Job and Family Services. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- If I know or have reasonable cause to believe that a patient or client has been the victim of domestic violence, I must note that knowledge or belief and the basis for it in the patient's or client records.
- If I believe that a patient presents a clear and substantial risk of imminent serious harm to him/herself or someone else and I believe that disclosure of certain information may serve to protect that individual, then I must disclose that information to appropriate public authorities, and/or the potential victim, and/or professional workers, and/or the family of the client.

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. While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future.

The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and I am not an attorney. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS: You should be aware that, pursuant to HIPAA, I keep Protected Health Information about you in two sets of professional records. One set constitutes your Clinical Record. It includes intake notes and other clinical notes that contain information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem impacts on your life, your diagnosis, the goals that we set for treatment, your progress towards those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, any past treatment records that I receive from other providers, reports of any professional consultations, your billing records, and any reports that have been sent to anyone, including reports to your insurance carrier. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing and the request is signed by you and dated not more than 60 days from the date it is submitted. 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 circumstances, I am allowed to charge a copying fee of \$1 per page for the first ten pages, 50 cents per page for pages 11 through 50, and 20 cents per page for pages in excess of fifty, plus \$15 fee for records search, plus postage. The exceptions to this policy are contained in the attached Notice Form. If I refuse your request for access to your Clinical Record, you have a right of review, which I will discuss with you upon request.

In addition, I also keep a set of Psychotherapy Session Notes. These notes are for my own use and are designed to assist me in providing you with the best

treatment. While the contents of Psychotherapy Session Notes vary from client to client, they can include the contents of our conversations, my analysis of those conversations, and how they impact your therapy. They also contain particularly sensitive information that you may reveal to me that is not required to be included in your Clinical Record. These Psychotherapy Notes are kept separate from your Clinical Record. While insurance companies can request and receive a copy of your Clinical Record, they cannot receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Session Notes without your signed, written Authorization. Insurance companies cannot require your Authorization as a condition of coverage nor penalize you in any way for your refusal. You may examine and/or receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Session Notes unless I determine that such disclosure would have an adverse effect on you.

PATIENT RIGHTS: HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Record and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that I amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Record 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 allows parents to examine their child's treatment records unless I decide that such access would injure the child or we agree otherwise. Children between 14 and 18 may independently consent to and receive up to 6 sessions of

psychotherapy (provided within a 30-day period) and no information about those sessions can be disclosed to anyone without the child's agreement. While privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, parental involvement is also essential to successful treatment. For children 14 and over, it is my policy to request an agreement between my patient and his/her parents allowing me to share 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. (In circumstances of unusual financial hardship I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.)

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court which will require me to disclose otherwise confidential information. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

Please also note that **a billing fee of \$10.00 will be charged for each month in which there is no payment on your account.**

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. Your insurance company may not cover services if they deem you have a pre-existing condition--that you received treatment for the same or similar condition in a period of time before buying the insurance.

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 become increasingly 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. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of

sessions. While much can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, I will discuss with you your option to continue therapy with me, with the understanding that you will be required to pay the full fee for services at the time of your session. If you feel unable to pay for therapy, I will do my best to find another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy.

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. I am required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I am required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire clinical record. In such situations, I will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. 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. By signing this Agreement, you agree that I can provide requested information to your carrier.

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.

It is very important that you understand that our agreement to bill your insurance company is a special free service provided to you by me. However, because ultimately it is your insurance policy, you are responsible for the full amount of your bill in the event your insurance company refuses to pay for services provided to you. Please be aware of any possible limitations of your insurance contract regarding psychological outpatient services.

Steven D. Nichols, Ph.D.

Licensed Psychologist

3200 Linwood Avenue, Suite 2

Cincinnati, OH 45226

(513) 321-7900

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THE INFORMATION IN THIS DOCUMENT AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY ITS TERMS DURING OUR PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP. YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW ALSO SERVES AS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HIPAA NOTICE FORM DESCRIBED ABOVE.

Signature

Date