

NOTEBOOK ON ETHICS, LEGAL ISSUES AND STANDARDS FOR COUNSELLORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

What is Counselling? We have an answer in the following *Definition of Counselling and its Scope of Practice*

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Counselling is often described as a comprehensive profession and this title is certainly justified given its tremendous diversity. We are diverse by: the titles we use, the variation in the clients we serve, the type of environments in which we work, and the many theoretical perspectives that inform our professional practices. Because of this diversity and the extensive and ongoing growth of the profession we have been challenged in our efforts to provide, both for ourselves and others, an inclusive definition of counselling and its scope of practice. Of course it has always been important to have such a definition and the parameters around our practices captured in a comprehensive manner. This is even more so today with so many groups across the country advocating and working for the statutory regulation of the profession within their respective provinces since any governmental regulator and regulatory statute is very likely to require such a definition and a scope of practice.

The good news is that we can now provide a positive and ready response to any such request or requirement. In 2007 the Canadian Counselling Association (now the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association CCPA) established a National Labour Mobility Working Group to address critical matters with respect to interprovincial/territorial mobility within the counselling profession in Canada and its implication for statutory regulation. The work of this Group was supported by funding over three years from the labour mobility centre in Human Resources and

Skill Development Canada (HRSDC). With these funds the Group was able to organize and deliver three symposia (2008, 2009, 2011) in Ottawa. These events brought together on each of these occasions 50 professionals identified as stewards of the counselling profession in their respective provinces. One of the many positive outcomes of these activities was a national survey conducted in 2010 by a Project Working Group (PWG) on a definition of counselling and the scope of practice it had developed. (both of these Groups were co-chaired by Dr. Blythe Shepard and Dr. Glenn Sheppard)

In 2010 following a period of extensive research the PWG developed a bilingual online survey that was sent to all counselling and counselling related organizations in Canada. The survey asked respondents to identify a number of demographics and professional attributes and then they recorded their level of agreement as to how well the titles, the definition of counselling, and its scope of practice presented in the survey reflected their professional identity and core beliefs.

Some of the key results of this survey were as follows:

- 46 organizations and 1416 individuals responded to the survey.
- 25.8% of respondents had been in practice 5 years or less; 15.5% for more than 20 years.
- 595 (42.0%) respondent were in private practice; 397 (28.0%) worked in schools and universities; agencies and health care settings accounted for most of the rest.

Results from the survey confirmed a clear understanding of the generic term "counselling profession" and that it was inclusive of (among others):

- Counselling therapist Career counsellor
- Counsellor d'orientation Mental Health Therapist
- Guidance counsellor Clinical Counsellor
- Psychotherapist

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the “definition of counselling” and the “scope of practice” were inclusive of them despite their personal use of more than 70 different variations on counselling-related titles and more than 250 practice types.

For both the **Definition of Counselling** and the **Scope of Practice** participants in this survey showed consistently an over 93% agreement, and always less than 4% disagreement regardless of differences in their places of work, job titles, ages, modalities and client base. These results show that we have a solid shared identity as a profession and the capacity to be inclusive and to embrace diversity while at the same time sharing a very strong core belief about our definition of counselling and its scope of professional activities.

Here is what was presented in the survey and about which there is such an extremely high level of near unanimous agreement across the country. This definition has been adopted by CCPA.

Definition of Counselling:

Counselling is a relational process based upon the ethical use of specific professional competencies to facilitate human change. Counselling addresses wellness, relationships, personal growth, career develop, mental health, and

psychological illness or distress. The counselling process is characterized by the application of recognized cognitive, affective, expressive, somatic, spiritual, developmental, behavioural, learning and systemic principles.

Scope of Practice:

The counselling profession:

- *Is attentive to and responds to diversity and inclusiveness;*
- *Works in the best interest of individuals, couple, families, groups organizations, communities, and the public-at-large;*
- *Works in the domains of cognition, emotion, expression, somatics, human development, behaviour, learning, and interactive systems;*

NOTE: to all those working towards statutory regulation across the country, the important work reported here is already done and is a gift to you. Remember there is no need now “to re-invent the wheel”.