

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

Going Back to Fundamentals: A Way Back!

by

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Recently when a young friend of mine was graduating from medical school one of the gifts I gave him was a framed copy of the Hippocratic Oath. He appreciated it very much and informed that he and his classmate took the Oath during their graduating commencement. This was also a reminder for me that some of our basic and fundamental ethical values come from antiquity and have been long-lasting.

The Hippocratic Oath is usually attributed to the Greek physician Hippocrates (460-370 BC). This ethical covenant has been changed and updated on a number of occasions. Taking the Oath is part of commencement programs at many medical schools. Some schools have their adapted version and, in other cases, the graduating class is expected to create their own version of it.

The Hippocratic Oath was modified by Louis Lasagna in 1964 and appears to be the one that now receives the most use. I am sharing it with you for this Notebook because it reminds us of the long history of some of our core values that remain relevant to all health professionals including counsellors and psychotherapists. Also, whenever I am in choppy ethical waters I find it helpful and reassuring to return to such basic core ethical values to help me navigate the ethical challenges.

The following are the **Ethical Principles** as stated in the **CCPA Code of Ethics**:

- a) **Beneficence:** Being proactive in promoting the best interests of clients.
- b) **Fidelity:** Honouring commitments to clients and maintaining integrity in counselling relationships.
- c) **Nonmaleficence:** Refraining from actions that risk harm and not willfully harming clients.
- d) **Autonomy:** Respecting the rights of clients to agency and self-determination.
- e) **Justice:** Respecting the dignity of all persons and honouring their right to just treatment.
- f) **Societal Interest:** Upholding responsibility to act in the best interests of society.

It maybe a valuable exercise to determine to what extent you can find these more formal and explicit principles in the personalized statements of the Hippocratic Oath. A few of my counsellor education colleagues have informed me that they have found it meaningful to give graduate students in their ethics course the task of reaching a consensus on their adapted version of the Oath that might better align with their anticipated professional work as counsellors and psychotherapists, Whatever your response to it I trust that its inclusion in this Notebook will be personally and professionally meaningful for you