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Office Policy and Procedures Agreement

Outpatient Services Contract

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

Psychotherapy Services

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and client and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for 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 benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of stress. 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.

Meetings

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, we can both decide whether 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 50-minute session (one appointment hour of 50 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 attend or pay a \$30 late cancellation fee unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation, or unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment.

Professional Fees

My hourly fee is \$90 for individual therapy and \$125 for couples and family therapy. 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 15 minutes, 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 my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party.

Billing and Payments

I use Medicus, a billing service for clients who wish to use their insurance to help pay for therapy. Medicus sends out invoices by mail on the first of every month for the previous month. On the invoice, you will see both the amount you owe (deductible and/or copay) as well as the amount pending with the insurance company. 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. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a client's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due.

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 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. If you miss an appointment without 24 hours notice, you will be responsible for the cancellation fee yourself, as most insurance companies will not pay for missed sessions.

You should read carefully the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator or Medicus at 708-535-7347. 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 rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become 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 a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some clients feel they need more services after insurance benefits end.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). 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.

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 are ready to end our sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

Contacting Me

I am not often immediately available by telephone. I probably will not answer the phone when I am with a client. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by a password-protected voicemail service that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call within one business day (does not include weekends and holidays). If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact the nearest emergency room (you can use 911 to be connected) and ask for the clinician/psychologist/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.

I provide my email address to clients. You may use my email to communicate with me regarding appointment times, i.e. if you are unable to keep a scheduled appointment. Please be aware that email messages can sometimes fail to arrive, and their confidentiality can be breached in transit. If you email me about treatment issues, I will read your emails, but I do not reply to them. We can discuss any emailed issues during our next appointment.

You are free to pass along my contact information to others who are looking for a therapist. I welcome referrals, which signify your satisfaction and trust in my services.

Professional Records

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records, or I can prepare a summary for you instead. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted by and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

Confidentiality

In general, the law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychotherapist, and I can release information about our work to others only with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony if he or she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child or elderly person is being abused, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency. If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective action. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm himself or herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him or her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely occurred in my practice. If a similar situation occurs, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action. I may occasionally find it helpful

to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel it is important to our work together.

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 at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and I am not an attorney.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Signature:

Name (printed):

Date:
