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ABSTRACT

Although mental health services have been somewhat slow to embrace new technologies, recent advances necessitate a reassessment in the role of technology in counseling. Ways in which technology can be utilized in counseling services are covered in this paper. Previously, most mental health offices relied on computers for some particular aspect of their work, but due to such factors as falling prices and improved Internet access, more practitioners are expanding their use of computers. Increased access to information for research purposes, in particular, make the Internet an attractive avenue; nonetheless, researchers are cautioned that ethical concerns regarding Internet practices are still emerging. Subsequently, the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics for researching cyberspace communities is presented here. Counseling services are also being provided over the Internet, via homepages and e-mail; thus, numerous pitfalls to avoid when using these services are elaborated upon. Particular attention is given to services that seem to outstrip the capabilities of their providers, such as secured information and qualifications. Other concerns, including cultural differences and payment for services, are also discussed. Contains 17 references. (RJM)

# The Influence of Technology on the Helping Professions

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Running head: TECHNOLOGY

Technology is dramatically changing the way we live our lives. With e-mail, fax machines, teleconferencing, and the Internet, it almost seems as if the world is becoming a smaller place. Mental health services have been somewhat slow to embrace these new technologies, as the delivery of services has historically required face-to-face contact. However, with recent technological advances, we must stop to consider the influence technology will have on the helping professions. As a profession, we must decide how technology will be utilized in our services and identify possible implications for the field and for our clients.

As this is a new frontier, there is currently much debate and confusion surrounding the use of the computer in psychological interventions. Some mental health professionals have had difficulty adjusting to the new technology and have found software, hardware, modems, sound cards, and the like to be difficult and confusing concepts. Other professionals may see little use for sophisticated computer systems in a field that primarily has relied on direct face-to-face contact. Perhaps more significantly, there is concern regarding the ethical considerations involved when using this new medium.

Most mental health offices today rely on computers for some aspect of their work, such as billing or word processing. However, with declining prices and more sophisticated equipment readily available, some professionals are already using the computer in ways that would have been unheard of only a few years ago. For example, professionals may consult with each other via newsgroups, chat rooms, and e-mail. Some testing programs are available online, and professionals can also download software that is applicable to their work. The Internet is being used as a new means of conducting research. Likewise, professional conferences and meetings have been held online in "real time."

Chambliss (1996) describes an incident in which the Internet was used for peer consultation in an incident involving an ex-client who stalked a therapist. The therapist had posted a message describing her stalking experience on the Net. Within only five days, she had received 42 replies to her posting! According to Chambliss, this feedback from the "virtual community technology" was a great help to the therapist, who received both support and advice on pertinent legal issues over the Internet.

Computers are also being used to teach college courses online. More than 300 community colleges now offer for-credit courses online (Murray, 1997). Many of these programs include psychology courses, and a TACT (Team-Assisted Computerized Teaching) program has been developed for computerized psychology courses. This year, "Western Governors' University" will be launched. This is a completely "virtual" two and four-year university that will span twelve Western states. With this system, students will be able to control their own learning and will be able to work at times convenient for them. According to Murray, students are more apt to speak their minds online rather than in the presence of classmates. An online university may be especially useful for non traditional students, working students, or for students who are parents of young children. To help reduce a sense of isolation, online student centers will be established for students to meet and converse online.

Of course, potential disadvantages of this system have been identified. Some question whether the Internet will really keep students engaged in the learning process. Also, it may become more difficult to prevent academic dishonesty. Student drop-out rates appear to be higher than normal with online courses, as the students must have a strong sense of self-discipline to complete course work in this manner. There is always the possibility of computer malfunctions, and the cost

of purchasing the technology required (CD-ROM programs, modems, Internet services) may be costly for a student population.

E-mail and web pages are already being used to conduct survey research. Some have suggested that e-mail may become a method of choice to conduct surveys of upper to middle class subjects (Mehta, 1995). In a study comparing Internet response rates to traditional mailing response rates, Mehta found one-half of all the e-mail questionnaires received were received in only two to three days. In contrast, it took three weeks to receive one-half of all completed mail questionnaires.

In this study, Mehta found response completeness to be about the same. E-mail was More convenient to use and was much less expensive, especially when surveying international participants. Overall, e-mail respondents wrote more comments, and the comments were found to be more insightful. The surveyor also felt that with e-mail surveying, it is more likely that a survey intended for a particular individual is will be read and responded to by that particular individual. That is, e-mail accounts are usually private, with no other person having access to or reading from a private e-mail account.

Several disadvantages have been identified with using this approach. The median income and education of U.S. e-mail users are well above the U.S. average. Thus, the group sampled may not be reflective of the population as a whole. Also, the sample is restricted to people who have access to computers and who are comfortable using them in this way. What is more, respondents may be sensitive about their e-mail account. If they pay by the volume of mail received, they may be displeased to receive online surveys and questionnaires.

When conducting psychological research on the Net, the situation becomes even more complicated. The Carnegie Mellon "cyber-porn" study has been cited as a poor example of

conducting research from the Internet. Thomas (1995) provides a good description of the ethical violations of this study. Thomas suggests that "the Carnegie Mellon study violates fundamental canons against deceptive data gathering, informed consent, and revelation of potentially harmful information." In this study, it appears that the experimenter went "undercover" to collect data, researching computer files to assess current usage of pornographic websites. Thomas feels the study clearly involves deception and fraud, as the subjects were unaware their accounts were being monitored and were not fully informed. Thomas also found ethical violations in that the subjects were not protected from risk and that the experimenter did not minimize potential harm. It is argued that investigators have an "obligation to exercise special caution" to insure that no harm can come to their subjects when data is obtained in this manner.

Storm King (1996) does an excellent job of exploring the ethical considerations that must be taken into account when reporting results of research done on Internet communities. The archived records of Internet groups are currently publicly available, and researchers have discovered the value of this data in studying the interpersonal dynamics of Internet groups. According to King, "the institutional review boards of major universities are granting researchers exempt or expedited (exempt from full review) status for this work, due to the public nature of the notes being analyzed." These studies often involve the lack of informed consent, as the group members are unaware that they are being monitored.

An example is given of an actual study where the experimenter downloaded, analyzed, and published the notes from a group, making no request to the individuals for permission. The exact name of the group itself and the exact date and times of sample notes were included in the published results. The investigator defended the measures used claiming that messages posted on a bulletin

board system are public information and that simply changing the names in the sample messages would insure the privacy of group members. King argues that, while the anonymity of the individual sender may have been protected, the sense of privacy for the group as a whole may have suffered. To make matters worse, this particular group that was analyzed was specifically for sexual abuse survivors, and the moderator of the group had posted a note requesting that professionals who were not sexual abuse survivors themselves were discouraged from joining the group.

King points out that, as the field is new and emerging, the "fine points of the ethical considerations involved are undefined." Hopefully, the ethical issues will be better identified and addressed in future research. King feels the potential for harm is greatest in these situations where members remain unaware that their messages are being analyzed. This creates a problem for the researcher, however, as informing the subjects that their postings are under review may often be a gross disruption of the actual group process.

King refers to the 1992 APA Code of Ethics, which suggests that the use of deception can be justified for studies in which a considerable gain in understanding is expected. King suggests that "deception implies purposeful misinformation or lack of full disclosure" and argues that analyzing the postings of a cyberspace group without getting permission from the author may not, in and of itself, constitute deception. However, he posits that the subject can still suffer negative consequences, even if deception is not used.

Internet group postings are often very revealing and intimate. When these postings are analyzed, there is the possibility of causing psychological harm to the author of the note (King, 1996). The author may feel violated. Also, harm to the members of the group might be expected if the results are published in such a way that the group or individual members could be identified.

According to King, "When the subjects believe they are in a private setting, the ethical dilemmas of a researcher surreptiously gathering data can not be ignored.

King discusses ways in which the 1992 APA Code of Ethics may be applied to researching cyberspace communities. Eight examples are presented below, with a summary of King's discussion.

1. Section 5.08 (b) (Use of Confidential Information for Didactic of Other Purposes) suggests psychologists ordinarily disguise confidential information so that individuals are not identifiable to others and so discussions do not cause harm to the subject. King suggests that the report should not include the kind of specific word for word quotes that allow someone to know they are the individual being discussed. Some researchers have argued that it is appropriate to include names and sources, as cyberspace postings are in the public domain and can be used within existing copyright laws. However, King argues that "removing any references to the identity of the author, location of or time of posting is the appropriate way to minimize the potential for harm..."

2. Section 6.06 (a) holds that "psychologists design, conduct, and report research in accordance with recognized standards of scientific competence and ethics." According to King, the field of cyberspace research is too new to have established ethical standards. However, researchers need to consider the effect of their report as if it were to be read by the subject. Researchers in this area need to be aware that they may be considered by the public to be setting the acceptable standards in this new area.

3. Section 6.06 (d) says psychologists will take reasonable steps to implement appropriate protections for their participants and others affected by the research. We should be aware that the "others" affected could include the group members as a whole.

4. Section 6.07 (Responsibility) requires psychologists to consult those with expertise

concerning special populations. According to King, cyberspace participants are a special population. Members may feel a false sense of privacy, as they are posting notes from their own home. Expertise in this area is not in the norm at this time, but King feels it could be developed.

5. Section 6.12 (Dispensing with informed consent) says that, before psychologists dispense with informed consent, they consider applicable regulations and IRB requirements and consult with colleagues as appropriate. King feels that non-reactive research strategies used in the analysis of cyberspace forums fall under the category of naturalistic observations. This would confer additional obligations on the researcher to insure no harm comes to the subjects.

6. Section 6.13 (Informed Consent in Research Filming or Recording) says psychologists obtain informed consent before filming or recording participants in any form, unless the research involves simply naturalistic observations in pubic places and it is not anticipated that the recording will be used in a way that could cause identification or harm. King argues that most people posting to cyberspace forums perceive a level of privacy higher than what actually exists and suggests that researchers are obligated to protect the perceived level of privacy.

7. Section 6.15 (Deception in Research) discusses, as mentioned earlier, the situations in which deceptive research may be utilized. King feels it would be difficult to make a case justifying the use of deception in the analysis of cyberspace forums. Thus, we should protect group members so they do not feel as if they have been deceived.

8. Section 6.17 (Minimizing Invasiveness) says that psychologist interfere with the participants only in a manner warranted by research design and consistent with the role as scientific investigator. King feels this code may argue more in support of non-reactive research measures, as it would suggest care should be taken not to disrupt the natural phenomena.

Thus, current APA guidelines can be interpreted in a manner consistent with cyberspace research. However, as the codes are subject to individual interpretation, the unique ethical issues involved when conducting research using the Internet needs to be better addressed. The examples given above discuss only the implications involved when analyzing notes that already exist in group situations. Research is also being conducted online that involves the collection of new data. This type of research brings different ethical considerations into play. For example, if the subjects are informed that they are being studied and are informed of consequences/benefits of participation, etc., what is the best way to document such informed consent? That is, if a person has acknowledged consent over the computer, how do we know that the person indicating consent is truly who they say they are? Or, if a problem should arise, would we be able to intervene appropriately if we are geographically separated?

King proposes five guidelines that, although written to address research with groups, would likely apply to any type of Internet research. He suggests that all headers and signatures be removed; that all references to a person's name or pseudo-name be removed from within the citation; that all references to the name and to the type of the group (e-mail, Bbs, etc.) be removed; that no specific reference be made to the location or exact type of forum studied; and that the original data be stored in a safe manner. Clearly, the Internet can prove to be a very useful tool for conducting research. However, we as a profession must adopt clearer guidelines and a better definition of what is the appropriate way to conduct psychological research using this new medium.

As you can see, the computer is already being used in many ways that appear beneficial to the professional community. Professionals use the Internet for teaching, research, consultation, and advice. Each of these methods raises unique professional and ethical considerations, and each has

the potential for abuse. But perhaps most controversial issue is whether or not psychological services can be provided directly to our clients using the computer.

Some professionals are already providing services directly to clients over the Internet. This field is so new that we are not even sure what to call these services. (Names such as cybercounseling, cybertherapy, cyberpsychology, online therapy, and e-therapy have been suggested.) Likewise, we are unsure as to what these services really are. That is, do such methods truly constitute psychotherapy, or are they mostly advice-giving mechanisms? Most professionals currently agree that, at the least, this is not psychotherapy in the traditional sense. Defining these services in terms that use the word "therapy" is offensive to some therapists (Metanoia home page).

The May 13, 1996 edition of the Online U.S. News proclaims that the "90's solution" to mental health problems may be to "E-mail your way to mental health for a fraction of the cost." One home page once boldly asserted, "Online help for those in need. When your world will not stop spinning, remember that ...the doctor is ALWAYS in!" With this particular service, the first session was free. The counselor stated, "You simply e-mail me your troubles and I will respond. If you like what you get then you may obtain additional sessions for only $5.00 (U.S.)." The provider also stated that "You may want to buy several sessions in order to avoid mail lag. I cannot answer any e-mail after your first until I receive your payment." Despite his claim that the doctor is always in, a thorough reading of the page suggests that the person who provided these services possessed a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology rather than a doctorate. However, as things in cyberspace change rapdily, a more recent visit to this site revealed that one-to-one services are no longer provided and that the site has been altered to more of a "question and answer" format.

Some sites that provide services make a dedicated attempt to take ethical and legal

considerations into account. One site (Therapy Online) provides a number of firewalls and full password protection to help provide for secure transmission of information. The page acknowledges that, while rare, third-party interception is a possibility. They ask participants to "please consider carefully whether you are willing to take the risk of third party interception. By paying for these services, you are consenting to take this risk." Furthermore, the page maintains that if you are under 19 (this is a Canadian provider), you must have a parent's signature and that having a parent e-mail consent is not sufficient. They inform potential clients up front that using an online service negates the possibility of verbal communication, but may allow the client to have more control over what is revealed. They add that if the client omits information, it may lead to an inaccurate assessment by the counselor.

Services provided and types of consent involved vary widely across providers . Some providers will limit themselves to only one e-mail response, viewing online communication as an adjunct to face-to-face therapy or as an initial icebreaker. One site advertised as "the oldest and largest Internet service devoted to helping people make informed choices" (ShrinkLink) includes a disclaimer that "online therapy" is considered unethical by most mental health professionals and urges the user to beware of sites that do not include proper credentials of providers. The providers on this page are five licensed psychologists, including a past president of APA. This particular site advertises that providers "review and comment on almost any important question in your life," but clearly states that the services are <u>not</u> a substitute for face-to-face counseling.

With this particular service, participants are instructed to submit a query that should be 200 words or less to a specialty area (family issues, relationships, depression, drugs/alcohol, eating disorders, sex/gender, obsessions, women's issues, or other). They are told they can expect an e-mail

response within 72 hours, but that responses are often received within 24 hours. Users must include credit card payment information with the first question, and they are charged $20 per valid question and response. A concern might be that no definition is provided of what constitutes a "valid" question. However, sample questions and answers are provided. Also, as with any time you submit credit card information via a computer, there is no verification process or signature required. This leaves some concern that a person could place unauthorized charges on another person's account if the account numbers and expiration date were known.

Another provider (Metanoia) addresses the concern of credit card security. It is mentioned that secure capability (SSL) exists for some transmissions, but it is suggested that the phone be used to transmit credit card information if a secure capability is not available. This page attempts to connect people who are referred to as "light-bearers" (including mental health professionals) with those who might benefit from their services. It is suggested that people who might benefit from ongoing Internet interaction with a therapist are: more likely to enjoy writing, are comfortable using the Internet, tend to write expressively, provide the therapist with honest and descriptive feedback, take responsibility for change, and are willing and eager to enter into the growth process. This site suggests Internet interaction with a therapist is not helpful for those who are not comfortable writing at length, whose writing is too intellectual or inexpressive, for those who conceal important feelings and information, or for those who are not willing to embrace the growth process.

This page also provides the prospective "client" with a discussion of the issues surrounding online therapy and the ethical considerations involved. Client care is discussed, as well as record keeping and confidentiality. The potential client is told that confidentiality could be broken in several ways. For example: another person could have access to their computer; the client could print the

records and they could be seen by another person; e-mail could be misaddressed and sent to the wrong person; someone could obtain their password; or, in rare situations, a computer hacker could intercept the message. Interestingly, a statement is included that, if the client is using a workplace computer the employer has a legal right to read e-mail on that machine!

Legal issues are also addressed. Clients are informed that there are no international laws governing therapists from geographically different areas. Likewise, laws differ from state to state in the U.S. There is some possibility that if both the therapist and the client reside in the same state, state laws may apply. However, the potential clients are warned that if something should go drastically wrong, "at the present time, you probably have no legal recourse against the therapist."

Finally, it should also be mentioned that the technology is currently available to provide live one-on-one sessions between a therapist and a client. Wired Senses Online Counseling provides both written e-mail sessions and "Cu-See Me Telecounseling." The counselors in this group are mostly Master's level providers. However, at least one licensed counseling psychologist is involved with the group. With this service, the first session is free. With subsequent sessions, a fee of $12 is automatically billed to a credit card. Potential clients of this service are informed that "this is a secure server. Information transmitted via this page will be safe." I have some concern with this claim, as it is my understanding that any server is potentially insecure. In fact, Spencer (1996) states, "Access through e-mail and Internet servers is relatively easy for an experienced hacker and there have been over one million reported security breaches on the Net in the last four years." Likewise, potential clients to this page are told that "Wired Senses will not be held liable for any irrational interpretations or reactions." Yet no definition of "irrational" is provided.

With the live Cu-See Me Telecounseling, the client must first have access to a digital camera

and the Cu SeeMe Software. Appointments last one-half hour, with a baseline fee of $25. Sessions are held seven nights a week, between 5 and 10 p.m. Clients are told that the providers want the services to be therapeutic "without making any claims that they constitute psychotherapy in the traditional sense." Feedback is requested, and the providers express a desire to make the services affordable for potential client. With this service, links to other "psychology" sites are provided, and a detailed section is included on suicide. Clients are told that if they are suicidal, this is not an appropriate venue. Links to suicide- related sites are provided, and it is recommended that the client consult the "blue pages" of their local phone book to find a 24-hour crisis line.

While the purpose of this paper is not to criticize any particular site, we must be concerned as a profession if providers are practicing beyond their competency or if they are claiming credentials they do not possess. The Internet itself remains a largely unregulated medium. Because the field is so new and uncontrolled, we as a profession could take advantage of this opportunity to help to develop proper guidelines, standards, and evaluations (Ingram, 1996?).

We are beginning to see increased attention to the special concerns related to counseling over the Internet. Ingram (1996) provides a summary and results from the 1996 California Psychological Association Annual Convention in San Diego's discussion of the "Ethics of Online Psychology." Clearly, interest in the area is rapidly growing. Ingram states that only about 5 people attended the 1995 computer seminar; in contrast, over 40 attended the 1996 session, resulting in an 800% gain in one year!

In this discussion, Ingram defines online therapy as practiced with a qualified, licensed professional with a client, screen to screen, on the Internet. Ingram reports mixed reactions to the concept of cybertherapy. Several limitations have been identified, including a lack of control (how

do you know for certain what is happening on the other end); more limited resources should the client become agitated; a more compromised relationship (no face-to-face, so is this really psychotherapy at all?); loss of metacommunication, as there are no non-verbal cues; and the concept that partial anonymity may provide another layer of "electronic defenses." Finally, Ingram reports some general resistance to change, i.e., "it's not how we've always done it."

The potential benefits of online therapy were identified. For one, sessions could be more flexible, and fewer sessions need be missed due to bad weather, sickness, etc. Likewise, this method may work well for maintenance appointments. This program could be a benefit to under served or difficult to access populations. The partial anonymity could be a perceived advantage, as a lessened sense of threat may lower the threshold for initial therapy contact. Online icebreakers could be beneficial to hesitant clients. As the field is so new, psychologists could become involved in cutting edge research and could help in developing guidelines and standards.

Storm King (1996) addresses some of the issues that may arise if the Internet is used to assist family therapy. It is suggested that clients unfamiliar with computers may find the process intimidating. King feels that because much is lost in this manner (visual cues, voice inflection, etc.), the therapist ethically must make sure that traditional methods will not be effective or are not possible before suggesting the incorporation of e-mail exchanges. Ethical issues arise such as the competence of the therapist to work in an untested medium. While close and frequent supervision may be helpful, no data currently exists to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach. There may be a tendency for clients to devalue notes on a computer screen, viewing them as cold or impersonal, or a distant member may feel separated from those in "real" therapy. According to King, other issues that need to be addressed include: what to do if a person becomes suicidal; what to do if a distant member

stops responding to e-mail or terminates prematurely; issues surrounding long-term follow up, and issues surrounding monetary compensation.

Dr. Marlene Maheu is pioneering research in the field with her study of online ethics. Her survey project can be found online at http://cybertowers.com/cgibin/ethics_forum.cgi. Currently underway, she is soliciting discussion of the dilemmas, concerns, successes, and solutions online. Respondents have commented on the ethical considerations of the following APA Codes: Professional and Scientific Relationship (1.03), Boundaries of Competence (1.04), Basis for Scientific and Professional Judgments (1.06), Describing the Nature and Results of Psychological Services (1.07), Avoiding harm (1.14), Fees and financial arrangements (1.25), Evaluation, Diagnosis, and Interventions in Professional Context (2.01), Competence and Appropriate use of Assessments and Interventions (2.02), Test Construction (2.03), Use of Assessment with General and with Special Populations (2.04), Interpreting Assessment Results (2.05), Unqualified Persons (2.06), and Obsolete tests and Outdated Test Results (2.07).

ACA is also interested in counseling via the Internet. ACA has presented two ACA Live! sessions (online professional forums) discussing the perceptions of counseling and counselor education in cyberspace. Kirk (1996) has conducted a survey of professionals to determine under what circumstances they view Internet counseling as appropriate. Kirk acknowledges that the small sample size (38) somewhat limits the results of the survey. However, of those surveyed, she found that 1/3 would not use the Internet for counseling or counselor education at all. Fewer than 25% reported they would use it for brief or long-term therapy, and the remainder indicated they would use it only as a supplement to fact-to-face therapy or to consult. The concerns most often cited included lack of security for confidential information, inaccessibility of visual and auditory cues, and lack of

a relationship-building human presence. Interestingly, few expressed concern about the implications of licensure laws.

Kirk suggests that, as a more advanced Internet is expected within ten years, several of these concerns will be alleviated. Encryption laws should help with confidentiality. The new system should allow individuals to see and hear one another. To help the counselor verify the identity of the client, voiceprints or thumbprints may be required.

Kirk also identifies several current ethical concerns. For example, the cost of the equipment, training, and on-line access may limit availability to some potential clients, resulting in an inequitable distribution of counseling services. In fact, computers are not currently distributed equally among populations. Using statistics from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Snyder (1996) concludes that, overall, "nearly 12% of Black households own PCs, compared with 30% of White households and almost 40% of Asian households." Some have predicted that, in the future, computer access will be more widely available through network computers or through public-access terminals, much like our current ATM machines.

Another area of concern is that of cultural differences. This may be of particular concern if the counselors are geographically distant, perhaps even living in different countries. Issues of privacy are also a concern. With current chat sessions, anyone who is in the session can save what is said. A goal for the future would be to find ways to ensure what specifically can be recorded. This will become more important as video and audio chats become available.

Kirk also suggests firewalls could be used so that no communication within an Intranet can be seen by outside Internet users. It is suggested that this may make communication with managed care and other professionals safer. Finally, it is recommended that consent forms be developed that

will cover specific ethical and legal considerations. Issues may include the client's agreement to pay prior to each session; arrangements on how the client will be charged if the client decides to sign off early; an understanding of client and counselor responsibility for handling and disposing of the sessions and e-mail; verification of counselor training and experience; an explanations of the drawbacks of this method; conditions of termination; and phone numbers of the client and an emergency contact.

Kirk concludes that the ACA Code of Ethics should constantly be studied and revised to reflect the technology available at a given time. The dissemination of Code changes could be provided over the Internet, facilitating frequent publication at a low cost. During the most recent ACA Live Forum (March 1997), it was mentioned that the NBCC is currently developing a WebCounseling Registry and WWW Counseling Code of Ethics. A rough draft of these proposals are available online at http://plains.uwyo.edu/~polson/webethic.htm. To be eligible for this registry, the provider must have NCC and/or state credentials, must submit their webpage for review, must submit a list of at least three webcounselors on call, must have their credentials verified by NBCC/CCE, and must pay a fee.

At this site, a two page draft of provider responsibilities in included. Providers agree to review all pertinent legal and ethical counseling codes for violations emanating from the local practice of WebCounseling and agree to follow all relevant ethical codes. They agree to inform clients of the use of encryption methods, inform WebClients if sessions are being supervised, follow appropriate procedures regarding the release of information, inform clients how and how long electronic session transcripts are being preserved, and maintain appropriate decorum in the preparation of their homepage. It is emphasized that self-disclosure on the part of the WebCounselor by adding pictures

of home, family, etc. needs to be kept in proper perspective. In addition, the provider will agree to provide "hot-links" to webistes of all appropriate certification boards and licensure boards, will obtain written consent if counseling a minor and will take steps to address the issue of "imposter clients." The list continues, as this is just a sampling of the proposed guidelines.

Clearly, these guidelines are a big improvement to a system that, until now, has gone largely unregulated. In the ACA forum (1997), reference was made to a JCD article (no further reference given) that says there are already 275 online counselors. With counselors already practicing online, we must immediately begin to better identify and address these issues. In the best interests of our clients, we must try to find some way to monitor the quality of these services.

There is obviously great potential for the Internet to be used in positive professional interactions. The Internet may prove useful for distance conferencing, distance learning, and professional consultation. However, before thoroughly embracing these new methods, we need to have at least a minimal understanding of computer systems and networks, and a thorough understanding of the implications of using the computer in our work. The various ethical dilemmas that have been discussed must be taken into consideration, with new guidelines being adopted as technology continues to change the way we work..

*Author's Note: Several specific websites have been identified in this paper. It is not my intention to question the appropriateness of services offered by any one provider, nor do I wish to single them out for public or professional scrutiny. These are only a few of the sites I found while researching this area. Many of the sites providing online services to clients attempt to uphold ethical principles.

Many maintain emphatically that they are not providing online therapy, but are providing advice. While researching this topic, I sent personal e-mail messages to many of the providers and researchers in this area. I found them to be extremely helpful and willing to provide links to other information sites. Most of my sources came directly from the Internet. Some sources provided incomplete citations, which will be reflected in the reference page. Please note that the information provided on particular sites was current at the time of writing. However, as rapid changes occur in cyberspace, it is possible that the information may have changed by the time this article appears in print.

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