

## **Provision of Services via Electronic, Distance Professional Services**

### **Board of Examiners for Licensure of Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Psycho-Educational Specialists**

**Effective Date: November 17, 2015**

In response to inquiries from licensees, supervisors and other interested parties, the SC Licensure Board has confirmed that it has no separate view per se with regard to the provision of services via electronic means as long as a licensee is practicing in a manner consistent with his/her training and experience, is receiving supervision as is appropriate, and the medium for doing so is not an issue. However, it is incumbent upon any licensed counselor, therapist or psycho-educational specialist to recognize that as he or she moves away from direct face to face contact with clients, there are losses to the processes and interactions.

The Board considers that the practice of counseling, marriage and family therapy occurs both where the therapist who is providing therapeutic services is located and where the individuals (patients/clients) who are receiving services are located. In order for an individual to provide counseling and therapy services in South Carolina, that individual must be licensed by the South Carolina Board for Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists and Psycho-educational Specialist. On this basis, if an individual licensed in South Carolina renders services electronically to an out-of-state client, it is recommended that the licensee contact the licensure board for counselors, marriage and family therapist or psycho-educational specialist in the state in which the clients resides to determine whether or not such practices are permitted in that jurisdiction. Licensees are advised to review the South Carolina Licensure Law and the Code of Ethics.

Delivery of clinical services via technology assisted media such as telephones, use of video, or the internet requires the therapist to be sensitive to various issues. These areas include: confidentiality, acquiring required signatures on intake forms (consent to treat, release of information, professional disclosure forms, consent to treat minors, consent to tape, etc.). Other issues include: confidentiality, boundaries of competence, computer security, avoiding harm dealing with fees and financial arrangements, and advertising. Other specific challenges include, but are not limited to verifying the identity of the client, determining if the client is a minor, explaining to the clients the procedures for contacting the therapist/counselor when he or she is off-line, discussing the possibility of technology failure and alternate means of communication if technology occurs. It is important for counselors and therapists to use encrypted technology as required by HIPPA. Clients should be informed of the encryption methods used to help ensure the security of communications. Also, counselors and therapists

should inform clients as to whether session data is being preserved and if so, for in what manner and for how long. In addition, clients need to be informed regarding the procedures that will be in place in receiving and releasing client information received through the internet and other electronic sources.

Last of all, it is important that when providing services through electronic methods, the counselor and therapist be knowledgeable regarding emergency services available in the communities where their clients live.