APA GUIDELINES for Psychological Practice in Health Care Delivery Systems

WORKING GROUP OF THE COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE AND STANDARDS (COPPS)

APPROVED BY APA COUNCIL OF REPRESENTATIVES
FEBRUARY 2025

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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Introduction

Psychologists are an expanding and integral part of interdisciplinary teams in health care systems across the United States (APA, 2018a; Bailey, 2020; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). From 2015 to 2030, hospital settings are forecasted to have the largest demand growth for psychologists with a 26% increase (i.e., 3,050 full time positions) in workforce opportunities (APA, 2018a). Recent recruitment for psychologists within health care systems is also expanding and often emphasizes needed skills related to leadership, teamwork, communication, and cultural responsiveness (APA, 2019a).

Professional practice guidelines are a resource for psychologists when applying their training, knowledge, and skillsets in particular settings, roles, and in respect to various competencies (APA, 2015a). The guidelines aim to go beyond clinical judgement and empirical research: They propose rationale and applications of how to effectively support the individuals we work with while moving the psychology profession forward. Health care delivery systems are the organizational structures through which people in the United States receive health care, including medical care, emergency care, hospital services, pharmacy services, and often mental health care. Education and training in health care settings present a unique opportunity to gain a better understanding of the health care system as a whole, as well as how to effectively operate and impact individuals on a larger scale, including population health initiatives and institutional agility such as policy changes in reaction to COVID-19 (APA, 2021a; Bell et al., 2017; Bell et al., 2020; McDaniel et al., 2014). Together, the increased growth of psychologists in health care settings and the unique health care system perspective and skills needed to navigate their roles warrant further guidance. The current professional practice guidelines on health care delivery systems were developed to offer recommendations on how to practice psychology in health care delivery systems that often face changing landscapes, roles, technologies, and responsibilities. The present guidelines place particular emphasis on specialty expertise, interdisciplinary work, ethical considerations, optimizing health equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as well as patient and professional advocacy. The present guidelines conceptualize EDI using the guidance from the APA (APA, 2021b), acknowledging structure and culture are needed to promote human rights, fairness, and dignity for all people. The guidelines are also heavily influenced by APA's strategic plan including emphasis on the application of psychological science as it relates to health care, elevating and enhancing psychology's contribution within health care settings (e.g., efforts to enhance population health and health equity), and more broadly, the efforts to position our field to address complex issues related to health and well-being (APA, 2024).

Psychologists work in diverse health care settings, including but not limited to, hospital clinics, primary care, integrative care facilities, rehabilitation centers, senior care facilities, behavioral health community clinics, outpatient community centers, and state and federal health care settings. In parallel, there is a widening range of individuals with whom psychologists serve and collaborate within the health care

systems including a full spectrum of medical and interdisciplinary professionals and patient populations across the full lifespan, with a range of acute and/or chronic conditions, and cultural, ethnic, and racial identities (APA, 2018b). Psychologists deliver professional services through direct and indirect patient care roles and responsibilities in health care delivery systems. Psychologists have training and expertise in communication, consultation, individual and group decision making, advocacy, and holistic care that distinguishes the professional practice of psychologists and can be applied across the full spectrum of roles within health care delivery systems. Additional considerations in the guidelines offer support regarding clinical privileges, reimbursement, optimizing systematic equitable access and quality of care, and technological competency (e.g., telehealth).

APA Guidelines and Standards

The term *guidelines*, in this document, refer to statements that suggest or recommend specific professional behavior, endeavors, or conduct for psychologists. *Guidelines* differ from standards. *Standards* are mandatory and, thus, may be accompanied by an enforcement mechanism; guidelines are not mandatory, definitive, or exhaustive. *Guidelines* are aspirational in intent. *Guidelines* aim to facilitate the continuous systematic development of the profession and to promote a high level of professional practice by psychologists. A particular set of *guidelines* may not apply to every professional and clinical situation within the scope of that set of guidelines. As a result, *guidelines* are not intended to take precedence over the professional judgment of psychologists that are based on scientific and professional knowledge of the field (APA, 2015a).

Compatibility

These guidelines are informed by, and in alignment with, American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, standards, and policies and are consistent with the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (APA, 2017), *APA's Strategic Plan* (APA, 2024), the *Professional Practice Guidelines: Guidance for Developers and Users* (APA, 2015a), APA's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Framework (APA, 2021b), *APA Guidelines on Evidence-Based Psychological Practice in Health Care* (APA, 2021c), *APA's Resolution on Advancing Health Equity in Psychology* (APA, 2021a), and the APA policy statement, *Role of Psychology and APA in Dismantling Systemic Racism Against People of Color in U.S.* (APA, 2021d).

Content and Scope

Beyond the scope of the current guidelines include but are not limited to the considerable growth in technological health care advances (e.g., informed consent logistics), global health care systems, and evidence-based practices. It should be noted that the guidelines are also limited in addressing the unique and numerous intersections between health care delivery systems and specific pathologies or treatments. These guidelines also do not provide specific recommendations related to training or continuing education in health care settings. Readers are encouraged to reference other sources such as France et al. (2008), Palermo et al. (2014), and Stiers et al. (2015), among others.

Development Process

These guidelines revise and build upon prior guidelines that have incorporated the topics of hospital privileges, credentialing, bylaws specific to hospital settings, psychology's distinct professional identity, involvement in institutional policies, diversity of roles of psychologists, provision of collaborative services, competency, and special expertise of psychologists (APA, 2013; See also, APA Board of Professional Affairs, Committee on Professional Practice Standards,1987; APA Board of Professional Affairs, Task Force on Hospital Privileges, 1991). The current guidelines were developed by an APA workgroup comprised of members of the Committee on Professional Practice Standards, the APA Director of Health Integration and subject matter experts in health care delivery systems. Diverse representation was sought out with respect to personal and social identities, professional settings and roles, and career stage (early to later career).With respect to racial and ethnic backgrounds, the workgroup comprised individuals with the following identities: White, Non-Hispanic (three workgroup members); Black, Non-Hispanic (one workgroup member); and White, Hispanic (one workgroup member). The workgroup also solicited feedback and consulted with the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Engagement and Outreach Executive Office of the American Psychological Association.

The Guidelines developers did not receive external financial support for this project. They did not receive funding to assist with the preparations of these Guidelines, meetings, or the literature review. They did not receive funds, grants, or other support for the development of this project other than allocations in support of APA Boards and Committees to meet and develop guidance. The Guidelines developers complied with APA's policy on conflicts of interest.

Expiration

This document is scheduled to expire in 2035, 10 years from the date of approval by APA Council of Representatives. After this date, users are encouraged to contact APA Practice Directorate to confirm that this document remains in effect.

Psychologists Apply Their Expertise Across the Full Spectrum of Roles in the Health Care Delivery System

GUIDELINE 1

Psychologists are Encouraged to Offer Their Special Expertise in All Areas of the Health Care System

Rationale

Human behavior impacts every aspect of health care delivery systems, and expertise in human behavior is relevant and helpful across the entire health care system (Kidd & Styron, 2020). Expertise in human behavior can guide the administration and management of all aspects of the health care delivery system including clinical service delivery, research methodology and program development, program system and organizational development, implementation, human-technology interaction, human behavior in groups and organizational systems, and the promotion of health equity while reducing bias, discrimination, and disparities in health care delivery (APA, 2021a; APA, 2022a; Vela et al., 2022).

Application

Psychologists' training and expertise offer a unique and valuable perspective on every domain of health care delivery (Bonin, 2018; Kaslow et al., 2015; Hong & Robiner, 2016). Psychologists strive to be involved in those aspects of the health care delivery system that are within the scope of their education, training, and expertise, including but not limited to:

- direct clinical care across service lines including mental health and medical clinics, inpatient, outpatient, and emergency services
- supervision of psychologists and psychology trainees as well as supervision and training of other related healthcare professionals (including but not limited to other mental health clinicians, and medical trainees such as psychiatry fellows)
- service/program leadership/administration (e.g., director of clinical program)
- development and administration of all institutional policies that govern psychology practice (see Guideline 5)
- informatics including routine data collection, remote patient monitoring, electronic health records, and other ways staff interact with technology as well as technology-mediated treatment delivery (Denecke et al., 2022; Payne et al., 2020)
- program development, quality assurance/quality improvement (QA/QI), and program evaluation (Bonin, 2018)
- basic, clinical, and translational research, including membership on institutional review boards (Czaikowski & Hunter, 2021)
- education of clinical staff, administrative staff, and leadership (Forsetlund et al., 2021)
- patient education, advocacy, and outreach consultation in all areas of the health care delivery system
- Human resources and wellness activities including recruitment and retention practices, occupational health and employee wellness, infection control, safety practices, EDI, and other behavior change initiatives
- Strategic planning and effective communication strategies
- Institutional ethics boards/committees (Mozdzierz et al., 1992)

GUIDELINE 2

Psychologists Are Encouraged to Function in Interdisciplinary Positions with Diverse Roles and Responsibilities and Apply Their Expertise to the Full Spectrum of Direct Health Care Delivery

Rationale

As health care delivery systems become more diverse and specialized, the direct health care services offered to patients become more varied and potentially complex. A broad understanding of human behavior enhances the health care system's ability to address the full range of health care needs including preventive approaches, and in addressing a wide range of concerns including psychiatric, behavioral, emotional, social, medical, or developmental need within their scope of competence. Competence includes skills and knowledge that are appropriate to the disease states or systems problems being addressed, the interventions used to address these diseases states or systems, and an overall cultural competency to practice in health care delivery systems. Health care delivery systems have perpetuated inequity and health

care disparities. A shift in health care systems is needed to attend to inequity and dismantle aspects of health care systems that perpetuate disparities and marginalization and is important to enhance quality care and promote health equity (APA, 2021a; Chin et al., 2012).

Application

While many psychologists will continue to provide traditional psychological services, such as in mental health assessment and intervention-focused settings (Neimeyer et al., 2022), psychologists are further encouraged to apply the full scope of clinical and health care-related expertise. Examples may include behavioral medicine (e.g., treating medical health conditions using behavior change techniques), neuropsychological assessment (e.g., assessing cognitive status) or rehabilitation psychology (e.g., assessing and intervening to improve rehabilitation), consultation and liaison services (e.g., providing short-term psychological recommendations for patients in other services), health promotion/disease prevention (e.g., improving factors in healthy people associated with risk of disease) across health service settings in interdisciplinary teams including integrated primary care, acute and chronic specialty medical settings, long-term care, and end-of-life care.

Psychological expertise is useful in a wide range of health care settings and psychologists' scope of practice includes direct service delivery, as well as consultation and training with teams of other health care providers in accordance with Boundaries of Competency (APA, 2017, Standard 2.01). Psychologists' training and expertise are well-suited for collaboration with other disciplines (Proctor & Vu, 2019). In terms of direct service delivery in health care systems, psychological services span a wide range of medical (e.g., infectious disease, obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiac health, traumatic injuries, brain injuries) and psychiatric concerns (e.g., mental health assessment and treatment), and psychologists are optimally suited to address the interaction of such concerns (e.g., the impact of mood concerns on medical adherence; Bassett et al., 2019). In addition, pediatric psychologists have unique expertise in evidence-based practice with children, adolescents, and families that applies across a variety of health conditions and practice settings. As a member of a health care team, psychological expertise may also be applied to enhance preventive approaches (i.e., identifying and reducing behavioral risk factors prior to disease onset) as well as early identification/secondary prevention efforts (e.g., screening for behavioral and mental health concerns; APA, 2022a). Psychological consultation may also enhance health care teams in supporting patient engagement, enhancing continuity of care, supporting shared decision making, improving medication adherence and other medical approaches, and helping teams adjust practices and communication as needed for patients with developmental, behavioral, or psychiatric conditions. Psychologists' knowledge of evidence-based approaches (e.g., ecological systems, biopsychosocial model) can help health care teams appreciate the ways in which contextual, behavioral, and psychological factors impact health.

Psychologists strive to educate interdisciplinary team members on the impact of trauma and other adverse life events on health and health care interactions (Brewer et al., 2020). Psychologists aim to continually enhance awareness of systemic social barriers to care (e.g., social determinants of health), and understand the impact of systemic racism and other biases such as those based on age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural background, disability, primary language and/or the intersection of these identifies on health care delivery and health care interactions (APA, 2019b; APA, 2021b; APA, 2022a; Vela et al., 2022). Psychologists strive to reduce barriers to health care engagement and enhance equity in health care access and delivery (APA, 2021b). Psychologists are urged to seek ways to integrate their unique expertise into diverse aspects of patient care including the integral use of science as it pertains to health care practice. Psychological training involves extensive exposure to research and as such, empirical skills may also be applied in health care settings to enhance research, QA/QI, and other clinical implementation efforts (APA, 2019c; APA, 2021c; Bonin, 2018). Psychologists' skills in measurement can also be applied to enhance measurement-based health care outcomes.

Psychologists strive to be supportive and effective interdisciplinary team members while also being aware of ethical boundaries such as multiple relationships in accordance with Boundaries of Competence (APA, 2017, Standard 2.01; see Guideline 3 for further discussion). Psychologists strive to be actively engaged in the development and implementation of policies related to emergency preparedness because psychologists may be called on to use their special expertise to mitigate the psychological impact of time-limited stressors on their colleagues in interdisciplinary teams (APA, 2020; Houtsma et al., 2022).

Psychology is a Distinct Profession Within the Health Care Delivery System

GUIDELINE 3

Psychologists Remain Cognizant of Their Ethical and Legal Obligations as Members of a Distinct and Autonomous Profession and are Prepared to Clarify How Their Distinct Roles and Services Relate to Those of Other Health Care Professionals

Rationale

Participation in interdisciplinary diagnosis, treatment, and care coordination within complex systems necessitates careful attention to maintaining distinct professional identity and ethical responsibilities. To function successfully in interdisciplinary settings and maintain their distinct professional identity, all professionals in health care delivery strive to understand and effectively communicate the unique ethical obligations, roles, skills, and contributions of their own expertise. Participation in interdisciplinary teams will be enhanced through individual awareness of one's own legal and ethical obligations, as well as how they may differ from other disciplines.

Application

The successful development, integration, and delivery of psychological services in health care delivery systems depends upon psychologists' abilities, willingness, and opportunities to explain how they might contribute to effective prevention, diagnosis, consultation, treatment, rehabilitation, and/or end-of-life care (Chenneville & Gabbidon, 2020). Psychologists maintain knowledge of The American Psychological Association's (APA) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct (hereafter referred to as the "APA Ethics Code") in such a way that they can communicate the unique standards and obligations of our profession to interdisciplinary colleagues (APA, 2017, Standard 3.09). Consistent with the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2017, Standard 2.01), persons treated in interdisciplinary health care delivery system settings, as in all other settings, should receive the highest quality of psychological services. For psychologists to function successfully in a broad range of modalities and systems of care, direct service needs to be delivered and supervised by those with the necessary training and experience, which is often tailored to the specific interdisciplinary setting. Psychologists working in health care systems strive to take proactive measures to understand legal obligations in the jurisdiction where they are performing service, especially when working in and/or providing care across state, national, and international borders.

Psychologists recognize the professional standards for psychology are, at times, considerably more stringent than those of other health professionals in health systems, including standards for relationships with patients, patients' family and caregivers for child and adolescent patients, and industry/conflicts of interest. Psychologists strive to uphold the ethical standards expected of psychologists regardless of routinely accepted practices within health systems in accordance with all APA Ethics Code Standards (e.g., 1.05 Conflicts Between Ethics and Organization Demands and 3.06 Conflicts of interest; APA, 2017).

Administration. Psychologists may advocate for adequate budgeting, staffing, business arrangements (e.g., contracts, billing; Patel & Campbell, 2021), supervision, and specialty competence for psychological services. Psychologists strive to avoid compromising professional judgment and quality of care in response to systemic constraints (Chenneville & Gabbidon, 2020). When psychologists work with health care colleagues and leadership outside of the profession, they seek to educate others on the specifics of psychological services performed in their setting. In any situation where organizational demands may conflict with ethics, psychologists strive to cite the conflict, clarify the conflict, and resolve the conflict in accordance with Standard 1.03, Conflicts Between Ethics and Organization Demands (APA, 2017). Psychologists remain cognizant of bias that reduces workforce participation of underrepresented groups and actively work toward improving pathways, recruitment, and retention efforts for underrepresented groups (APA, 2021a).

Psychological Professional Practice. Psychologists strive to provide clinical services strictly within the boundaries of their competence as outlined by Standard 2.01 Boundaries of Competency (APA, 2017). Psychologists seek to avoid delegating work to those who cannot adequately perform it due to lack of training or experience. Instead, psychologists strive to provide scaffolding and supervised experiences to others when and where appropriate, including but not limited to clinicians from other disciplines, psychologists seeking to broaden areas of expertise, and psychology and other behavioral health trainees (Borders, 2014). Psychologists aim to involve and collaborate with patients and for child and adolescent patients, patients' families, in all aspects of their care including using shared decision-making and facilitating collaborative discussions related

to psychological recommendations, patient-centered outcomes, and patient satisfaction regarding their care (Patel et al., 2008; Shay & Lafata, 2015; Resnicow et al., 2022). Psychologists strive to provide culturally informed care and remain patient-centered in their approaches to treatment-planning and implementation. They strive to be ambassadors of the profession, educating patients and multidisciplinary colleagues about behavioral health topics and the unique roles of psychologists within a health care delivery system.

Legal. In the context of expanded telehealth care delivery (Chiauzzi et al., 2020), psychologists working in health care settings may be increasingly providing services across state and national borders. When engaging in interjurisdictional practice, psychologists strive to take proactive measures to understand the legal requirements for temporary or full licenses to practice in the US outside of their home state. They aim to follow all guidelines and regulations made by their state licensing boards and the health care service settings in which they work regarding providing services in other states. Likewise, when considering international work, psychologists strive to maintain the same ethical and equitable conduct that governs their work in their country of origin. They aim to advance their profession by working collaboratively with international colleagues and being culturally responsive in the work they do internationally.

GUIDELINE 4

Psychologists Seek to Understand the Expectations and Requirements of the Systems in Which They Practice and Resolve Conflict With Psychological Practice When It Arises

Rationale

Health care delivery systems are complex and highly structured organizations (Braithwaite et al., 2020). Effective and appropriate patient care depends upon sufficient familiarity with the environment, culture, and context in which such care is delivered. Delivery of services in such a system involves navigating or negotiating system requirements in relation to patient needs. Prioritizing optimal care involves addressing system limitations and may include using one's role in the health care delivery system to bring attention to and modify systems that perpetuate health care inequities to promote systems and structures that increase equitable access to health care.

Application

Psychologists strive to maintain a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the health care delivery systems within which they practice, including site, cultural, and national expectations and requirements for: patient administration, management, and discharge; assessment and treatment protocols; emergencies; patient safety, restraint, and restrictions of freedom; procedure codes and billing/bundling; informed consent; documentation, record keeping systems, and sharing of patient information; and other issues in accordance with Standard 2.01 Boundaries of Competency (APA, 2017) . They seek to learn the institutional bylaws, administrative reporting, interdisciplinary relations, and organizational and governing structures of the institutions. They also strive to familiarize themselves with the pertinent regulations of the accrediting bodies for the health care delivery systems (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act [HIPAA] of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-101; Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 2023) (HIPAA; APA Practice Organization, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, 2009), and applicable state and federal laws governing the practice of psychology and hospital licensure. They strive to familiarize themselves with the ways in which health care delivery systems perpetuate injustice (e.g., health care disparities) and address bias and discrimination in their own health care delivery system (APA, 2021a).

Psychologists are mindful of ethical quandaries in health care delivery settings as it relates to the system in which they practice. It is important for psychologists to disclose to patients the nature of their relationship with the organization, how this may impact care, and who will have access to information regarding their care in accordance with APA Ethical Standards 4.01 Maintaining Confidentiality, 3.10 Informed Consent, 4.04 Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy, 4.05 Disclosures, and 4.06 Consultations (APA, 2017; Ashton & Sullivan, 2018). Psychologists are knowledgeable regarding patient rights regarding health care record release and privacy. They are thoughtful about documentation in medical records (e.g., use of systems-centered language; O'Reilly, 2020) and communicate with patients about electronic health records, as indicated, and related questions involving privacy and confidentiality. Psychologists also appreciate that their ethical obligations to protect patient confidentiality may be more stringent than, or qualitatively and/or procedurally different from, other rules governing the exchange of health information among providers within the health care delivery system (Fivecoat et al., 2017). This discrepancy necessitates vigilance on the part of psychologists in their informal communication with interdisciplinary colleagues, and in their communication with patients in shared clinical settings or with technology (Van Liew, 2012).When psychologists note limitations in the system that impact patient care, they strive to work within the health care delivery system to advocate for changes that enhance their ability to provide optimal psychological services to patients. Psychologists aim to stay up to date on billing codes and practices that best capture

the range of behavioral health services provided in health care service delivery settings, with the goal of accurately quantifying the positive impact psychologists in these settings have on patient care. Psychologists strive to understand billing from a revenue perspective as this helps quantify our value added to health care settings. Data regarding billing and revenue is often essential in advocating for additional hiring of psychologists within a system.

Privileges and Roles of Psychologists in a Health Care System

GUIDELINE 5

Psychologists Are Encouraged to Seek Appropriate Staff Appointments and Clinical Privileges Within Health Care Delivery Systems

Rationale

Health care systems benefit when members of a profession are performing at the top of their skill set at an appropriate level of autonomy that matches their training and licensure. To be effective in performing roles within health care systems, health care professionals need appropriate appointments and clinical privileges for their level of training and expertise for the roles in which they are expected to function.

Application

Psychology is an independently licensed health care profession (APA, 2015b). Psychologists have skills and expertise that are applicable for unsupervised work in multiple domains of independent practice. The unique skills of psychologists can provide critical functions to health care systems and improve care quality across the health care system; to be effective in these professional roles within those systems psychologists need to have appropriate appointments and privileges for their level of training and expertise for the roles in which they are expected to function. Psychologists provide the most effective professional services when embedded in the care system that they are expected to impact or operate (e.g., shared budget/finances, space, leadership structure, etc.). That care system may be predominantly mental health but could be another medical or administrative system within the health care system. Certain accrediting bodies (e.g., Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities [CARF], Joint Commission) consider psychological services to be an important element of the routine care of patients in health care settings (Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations, 2023; Committee on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, International, 2022).

Psychologists are encouraged to seek the highest level of medical staff appointment available within their health care system (Eckleberry-Hunt et al., 2009; Hong et al., 2012). Psychologists strive to obtain independent clinical privileges commensurate with their doctoral level of training (Bell et al., 2017). They endeavor to obtain the broadest range of clinical privileges for which they may be eligible within these systems (Robiner et al., 2010). When applicable, these privileges may include prescriptive authority (Brown et al., 2021). Psychologists strive to promote equal access to privileges in their health care delivery system across historically underrepresented groups (Saizan et al., 2021). Psychologists strive to maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their privileges and excel in their specialty area in line with Standard 2.01 Boundaries of Competence (APA, 2017). Psychologists will maintain the knowledge and skill requirements as set out by their licensing boards, which typically differ from requirements set out by other professions' boards (e.g., medicine) (Robiner et al., 2012).

Psychologists may seek recognition in specialties and subspecialties in professional psychology through teaching and training, contributing to professional organizations, and, when a well-established applicable board exists, seeking board certification (Baker et al., 2022; Janicke et al., 2015). Psychologists working in health care systems involving teaching, education, or training seek academic faculty appointments, promotion, and tenure (LaPaglia, et al., 2017; Rague-Bogdan, et al., 2020; Robiner et al., 2021). Psychologists are encouraged to seek staff and academic appointments in the departments in which they conduct the majority of their professional behavior (Drotar, 2015). Although many psychologists may have appointments in mental health departments, psychologists who primarily work in medical or administrative departments seek to obtain staff appointments, privileges, and academic appointments in the relevant department.

GUIDELINE 6

Psychologists Strive to be Involved in the Development and Implementation of Institutional Policies That Affect Professional Scope of Practice, Service Delivery, Care Access and Quality, Performance Metrics, and Ethics

Rationale

Active participation in the administration and leadership of health care delivery systems enables health care professionals to contribute to, as well as monitor, the development and implementation of institutional policies and procedures that affect and promote service delivery. In turn, optimal policies and procedures for the practice of each discipline ensure the appropriate use of the discipline's own expertise for the maximum benefit, and the upholding of high professional standards for the practice of each discipline.

Application

Commensurate with their training and expertise, psychologists seek to be involved in program, service, departmental, and systemwide leadership, including participation in establishing criteria for specific clinical privileges for psychologists. Accrediting organizations (e.g., Joint Commission, CARF) require health care systems to have a clear process for appointment to medical staff and determination of privileges, which often includes peer review. It is important to recognize that psychologists, and not psychiatrists or other medical professionals, are the appropriate peers for other psychologists (Robiner et al., 2010). Therefore, it is crucial that psychologists are eligible for medical staff voting privileges and for membership on the medical staff executive committee, as these are the organizations within a health care system that determine privileges for psychologists practicing within health care settings.

Medical staff credentialing committees strive to understand the differences between physician and psychology training models, particularly as it relates to board certification. Board certification in psychology is a voluntary process (i.e., as opposed to required licensure) with most licensed psychologists not being board-certified (APA, 2022c). Data does suggest a higher proportion of psychologists based in hospital settings (i.e., 18%) and VA Medical Centers/Military Hospitals (i.e., 14%) are certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology than those practicing elsewhere (APA, 2022d).

Psychologists seek leadership activities concerned with administration in the organization. Psychologists seek leadership in the individual program, service, and/or department in which their appointment resides, which may or may not be a psychology or behavioral health department. They seek and accept appointment to medical staff committees for credentialing that provide peer review and oversight for the granting and renewal of both staff appointments and clinical privileges, regulation of activities of the health system (e.g., institutional review boards, education and communication committees), as well as ethics committees and the determination of internal disciplinary actions for psychologists who violate rules and regulations. Similarly, they strive to be actively involved in leadership activities concerned with QA/QI, performance expectations (e.g., relative value units assigned to psychological service delivery and expectations regarding relative value units for psychologists' positions), and risk management.

Psychologists seek to be involved in leadership activities concerned with modality of treatment delivery and use of behavior change techniques to improve engagement with the health care system. Psychologists strive to educate colleagues in the health care system about the benefits of having a psychologist on staff across service lines, and the unique skills psychologists can bring to bear in a variety of medical and administrative roles. Psychologists in leadership roles may be well poised to address systems-level issues related to access to care and health equity APA, 2022a). Psychologists strive to set policies to facilitate the optimal delivery of psychological services, including space requirements and length of sessions commensurate with the diverse needs of patients.

Psychologists seek to be involved in leadership activities related to employee wellness, recruitment, retention, workforce development, and EDI across the health care system. Psychologists in leadership roles seek to recognize and create opportunities for psychology workforce development, including training, hiring, and retention. Psychologists remain cognizant of bias and systems of oppression that reduce workforce participation of underrepresented groups and actively work toward improving pipeline recruitment and retention efforts for underrepresented groups.

Optimizing Health Care Service Delivery

GUIDELINE 7

Psychologists Are Encouraged to Promote the Optimal Delivery of Their Services Through Effective Communication With Other Health Care Professionals

Rationale

Health care delivery systems are composed of providers from a variety of disciplines and training backgrounds. Providers must speak a common language to avoid miscommunication. Miscommunication, particularly of behavioral and mental health concepts, may contribute to stigmatization of patient populations commonly marginalized within health care delivery systems. Communication in the health care delivery system occurs via multiple channels and time frames and may differ across organizations. On interdisciplinary teams, professionals communicate their findings in a timely manner and through the channels expected by interdisciplinary team members to ensure the uptake and use of their findings in treatment planning and implementation. Errors in documentation in health systems can lead to negative consequences for patients and other stakeholders (Kohn, et. al., 1999). In many jurisdictions, patients have a right to access their medical records and health care professionals should be aware of all potential readers during the process of documentation (HIPAA – Final rule).

Application

To minimize barriers to patient care, psychologists working in health care delivery systems strive to learn and speak the "languages" of the systems in which they work (e.g., medical and organization-specific terminology) and are mindful of communicating psychological concepts in a manner other professionals can understand (Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 2023). Psychologists strive to avoid jargon and instead to communicate their findings in language that is understandable to the nonpsychologist health care providers with whom they interact. Psychologists strive to increase awareness of patients' experiences of their illnesses and interaction with the health care delivery system in their communication with other providers. Psychologists are mindful of the ways in which their patients experience stigma and strive to promote inclusive language in their communication with other providers.

In particular, psychologists are mindful of the ways in which psychological findings could be used to dismiss or discount patient's other presenting concerns (Henderson et al., 2014) and actively combat these stigmatizing attitudes through educating fellow providers about the ways in which psychological factors may or may not influence medical conditions and the utility of psychological interventions to treat a wide range of medical and mental health concerns. Psychologists are mindful of the privacy rights of the patient and record only that information which is necessary for the care of the patient (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003) and in accordance with APA Ethical Standards 4.01, Maintaining Confidentiality, 4.02 Disclosures, 4.04 Minimizing Intrusions on Privacy and 4.06 Disclosures (APA, 2017). Psychologists provide clear documentation, keeping in mind all possible audiences including legal, payors, administrative, medical, and other professionals, and the patient and their personal representatives (APA, 2007; APA, 2017).

Psychologists seek to understand norms around the timeliness and routes of communication expected by fellow members of the health care delivery team. Psychologists are actively involved in all relevant methods of communication among the health care delivery team, including electronic health record, case consultation, and patient care rounds. Psychologists only communicate information that is relevant for a patient's treatment with the care team and other treating professionals to avoid inadvertent disclosure of information a patient may desire to keep private. Psychologists provide information in a time frame and format such that it can be integrated for optimal patient care.

GUIDELINE 8

Psychologists Involved in Practice Within Health Care Delivery Systems Strive to Gain and Maintain Appropriately Specialized Competence

Rationale

Disciplines across health care professions are constantly evolving with advances in science and practice. It is important that health care professionals strive to attain and stay abreast of the specific knowledge, skills, and scientific literature relevant to their job roles and duties and practice only within the boundaries of their competence (APA, 2017, Standard 2.01).

Application

As is described in the APA Ethics Code (APA, 2017, Standard 2.01, Boundaries of Competence) psychologists are expected to participate in roles that align with their areas of competence. They

actively work to maintain competence for any roles in which they currently serve (APA, 2017, Standard 2.03, Maintaining Competence). Psychologists may also endeavor to expand their competence in domains relevant to their current and expected roles within health care delivery systems.

To maintain and develop competence related to their role in the health care delivery system, psychologists strive to engage in continuing education and training to enhance their performance of job responsibilities and their duties. In new emerging areas in health care service delivery, they strive to take reasonable steps to ensure the competence of their work by using relevant research, training, consultation, and/or study (Belar et. al., 2001).

Psychologists are encouraged to develop and maintain competence in evidence-based practices for illness-specific treatment for both mental health and medical disease states that they are involved in treating. Psychologists may elect to, for example, participate in training alongside medical colleagues to optimize understanding of certain diseases, treatments, and medical modalities of care that may complement psychological interventions and inform the psychologist's role as a consultant. Psychologists endeavor to develop and maintain competency in technology-mediated treatment modalities including telehealth, as well as try to maintain awareness of innovative health care applications. Psychologists are mindful of the emerging telehealth benefits (e.g., patient-centered care, increased health care access and feasibility) and challenges (e.g., digital literacy, risk management, and ethical considerations) related to technology-based treatment (Chiauzzi et al., 2020; Hilty et al., 2013; Maheu et al., 2021). To gain and maintain technology-mediated treatment competence in their health care delivery role, psychologists strive to engage in continuing education and training to enhance their own digital literacy skills. Psychologists strive to take reasonable steps to offer access to the highest quality of health care while operating within HIPAA-adherent and evidence-based technologies. Psychologists strive to be aware of emerging technology, such as digital therapeutics and artificial intelligence, and consider the impact on care including variables related to enhancing access, managing risk, regulatory considerations, and relative evidence-based support of the modality (Dang et al., 2020).

Psychologists strive to provide culturally responsive and culturally informed care in health care delivery, including specific evidence-based approaches for best practices with patients of various gender, race, ethnicity, language, culture, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religious practices, disabilities, and nationality.

Psychologists are mindful of the specialized training needed for working with patients across the lifespan. Psychologists working with pediatric patients strive to develop competence and expertise in health care delivery for children, adolescents, and their families (APA Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice for Children and Adolescents, 2008). Similarly, psychologists working with adults in later life focus on excellence in health care delivery for older adults. (APA, 2024).

Psychologists pay special attention to the impact of recent events on the scope and nature of potential behavioral health and psychosocial concerns of their patients, their colleagues and themselves. Therefore, they strive to actively practice self-care to ensure their continued competence and support other health care professionals in combatting burnout toward this same aim (APA, 2017, Standard 2.06; Brownsberger & Sunderaraman, 2017).

For those areas of psychology with relevant boards, achieving and maintaining board certification may be one way in which psychologists strive to demonstrate specialized competency. Psychologists may also strive to demonstrate subfield or specialized competencies through ongoing training and education, such as formal specialized postdoctoral programs, targeted continued education and seeking specialty certifications.

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