

# OUTPATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR COLLATERALS

## INTRODUCTION

Thank you for accepting the invitation to assist in therapeutic treatment for \_\_\_\_\_. Your participation is important, and is sometimes essential to the success of the treatment. This document is to inform you about the risks, rights and responsibilities of your participation as a collateral participant.

## WHO IS A COLLATERAL?

A collateral is usually a spouse, family member, or friend who participates in therapy to assist the identified patient. The collateral is not considered to be a patient and is not the subject of the treatment. Therapists have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to patients, and the privacy of the relationship is given legal protection. The therapist's primary responsibility is to the patient and their interests come first. You also have less privacy protection.

## THE ROLE OF COLLATERALS IN THERAPY

The role of a collateral will vary greatly. For example, a collateral might attend only one session, either alone or with the patient, to provide information to the therapist and never attend another session. In another case a collateral might attend all of the patient's therapy sessions and his/her relationship with the patient may be a focus of the treatment. The therapist will discuss your specific role in the treatment at your first meeting and other appropriate times.

## BENEFITS AND RISKS

Psychotherapy often engenders intense emotional experiences, and your participation may engender strong anxiety or emotional distress. It may also expose or create tension in your relationship with the patient. While your participation can result in better understanding of the patient or an improved relationship, or may even help in your own growth and development, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Psychotherapy is a positive experience for many, but it is not helpful to all people.

## MEDICAL RECORDS

No record or chart will be maintained on you in your role as a collateral. Notes about you may be entered into the identified patient's chart. The patient has a right to access the chart and the material contained therein. You have no right to access that chart without the written consent of the identified patient. You will not carry a diagnosis, and there is no individualized treatment plan for you.

## FEES

As a collateral you are not responsible for paying for my professional services unless you are financially responsible for the patient.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of information in the patient's chart, including the information that you provide to the therapist, is protected by both federal and state law. It can only be released if the identified patient specifically authorizes the therapist to do so. There are some exceptions to this general rule. (please check with your state to make sure the following apply. In addition, if your state has other mandated reporting statutes, you should consider including them in the following list)

- If there is suspected abuse or neglect of a child or a vulnerable adult, the therapist is required to file a report with the appropriate agency.
- If there is a belief that you are a danger to yourself (suicidal) the therapist will take actions to protect your life even if your identity must be revealed to do so.
- If you threaten serious bodily harm to another, the therapist will take necessary actions to protect that person even if your identity must be revealed to do so.
- If you, or the patient, is involved in a lawsuit, and a court requires that the therapist submit information or testifies, the therapist must comply.
- If insurance is used to pay for the treatment, the clients insurance company may require the therapist to submit information about the treatment for claims processing purposes or for utilization review.

You are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the identified patient (your spouse, friend, or child) in your role as a collateral.

## **DO COLLATERALS EVER BECOME A FORMAL PATIENT?**

Collaterals may discuss their own problems in therapy, especially problems that interact with issues of the identified patient. The therapist may recommend formal therapy for a collateral. These are some examples of when this might occur.

- It becomes evident that a collateral is in need of mental health services. In this circumstance the collateral needs to have a clinician, diagnosis, and chart records kept.
- Parents, being seen as collaterals as their child is being treated, and need couples therapy to improve their relationship so they can function effectively as parents.

Most often, but not always, the therapist will refer you to another clinician for treatment in these situations. There are two reasons the referral may be necessary:

- Seeing two members of the same family, or close friends, may result in a dual role, and potentially cloud the therapist's judgement. Making a referral helps prevent this from happening.
- The therapist must keep a focus on the original primary task of treatment for the identified patient. For example, if the therapist started treating a child's behavioral problem, then takes on couples therapy with mom and dad to address their relationship problems, the original focus of therapy with the child may be lost. A referral helps the clinician to stay focused.

One exception to these guidelines is when a family therapy approach can be effectively and ethically used to treat all members of the family, or each of the couple.

## **RELEASE OF INFORMATION**

The identified patient is not required to sign an authorization to release information (Release of Information Form) to the collateral when a collateral participates in therapy. The presence of the collateral with the consent of the patient is adequate. This provides some assurance that full consent has been given to the clinician for the patient's confidential information to be discussed with the collateral in therapy. The Release of Information Form is also helpful to the therapist on those occasions when receiving a telephone call from a collateral or when the therapist calls a collateral for one reason or another. In most instances the therapist cannot take a call from a collateral without a Release of Information Form.

## **PARENTS AS COLLATERALS**

Therapists specializing in the treatment of children have long recognized the need to treat children in the context of their family. Participation of parents, siblings, and sometimes extended family members, is common and often recommended. Parents in particular have more rights and responsibilities in their role as a collateral than in other treatment situations where the identified patient is not a minor.

In treatment involving children and their parents, access to information is an important and sometimes contentious topic. Particularly for older children, trust and privacy are crucial to treatment success. But parents also need to know certain information about the treatment. For this reason, you will need to discuss and agree about what information will be shared and what information will remain private. In general, parents should be informed about the goals of treatment and how the treatment is going and whether the child comes to his/her appointments. In addition, the therapist will always inform you if there is concern that your child is in danger or if he/she is endangering others.

## **SUMMARY**

If you have questions about therapy, these procedures, or your role in this process, please discuss them with the therapist. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with your therapist. By signing below you indicate that you have read and understood this document.

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Signature

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Date