DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF PROFESSIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL AFFAIRS
STATE BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGY

In the last Newsletter, the Board addressed the parameters for discussing the patient's/client's need for medication with a patient/client. The purpose was to inform practitioners of the necessity to maintain boundaries between various disciplines particularly medicine and psychology. The Board believed it would be unfortunate for a psychologist to unintentionally engage in behavior which might subject him/her to allegations pertaining to the unlicensed practice of medicine. Based on the comments which the Board has received, however, it appears that the Board's statement has caused confusion among licensees. The following discussion is intended to alleviate this confusion.

Once a psychologist has completed a comprehensive assessment of a patient/client, he/she has the duty to advise each patient/client of all treatment options, one of which may be medications. A psychologist also has a duty to refer patients/clients to other providers for services which the psychologist may not legally perform. When discussing medication as a treatment option, a psychologist should make it clear to the patient/client that although psychopharmacology may be an important, and sometimes even an essential part of the treatment, that specialty is outside of the psychologist's area of licensure and the patient/client must speak to a physician. The psychologist may inform a patient generally about classes of drugs, but not recommend specific drugs or dosages.

The collaborative involvement of the physician, the psychologist and the patient/client is crucial. As part of that collaboration, it is appropriate for a psychologist to receive information from the patient/client about the behavioral, cognitive and affective responses to the medication. How is the patient/client feeling? What does the patient/client perceive to be his/her reaction to the medication? What behavioral symptoms does the patient/client believe to be in response to the medication? Similarly, it is appropriate for the psychologist to explain to a non-compliant or reluctant patient/client the importance of the medication and how it is an important compliment to the psychotherapy.

Upon receiving this information from the patient/client, the psychologist should encourage the patient/client to discuss his/her progress with the prescribing physician. Also, once the patient's/client's permission has been secured, the psychologist should talk directly with the physician about the patient's/client's symptoms and behaviors. These discussions afford the psychologist and the physician an opportunity to share information from their unique vantage points. The discussions also help the physician evaluate the patient's/client's response to the medication.

The Board intends for this article to assist licensees in exercising professional judgment. It is not intended to provide approval or advise on specific conduct or behavior.

Adopted July 17, 2000