Best Practice Guidelines for the Provision of Counselling Services in the Post-Secondary Education Sectors of Australia and New Zealand

(updated September 2010)[1]

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This document provides information and guidance on best practice for student counselling services in post secondary institutions in Australia and New Zealand. It has been developed under the auspice of ANZSSA, the professional association concerned with the provision of support services to students in higher education, and contributed to by the Heads of Counselling and Counsellors Interest groups within this association (ANZSSA, 2004).

The post secondary education context in Australia and New Zealand is continually evolving. Student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, including growth in the number of international students and non school leavers. Principles of equity, increased participation, internationalisation and the broader issue of the student experience are current in the strategic planning of post secondary institutions. Counselling services within this context need to continue to provide students with high quality psycho-educational services with a capacity to respond to students in both face to face and in on-line environments. The delivery and management of the professional services needs to adapt to the increasing demands of students with mental health issues and other complex personal and social circumstances.

This document is intended for use by managers and direct service professionals who provide a spectrum of counselling services within post-secondary institutions. The recommendations detail best practice strategies and mechanisms for managers and staff who are working in, or establishing, services that strive to achieve the highest standards of ethical professional service to the student community.

These best practice recommendations are informed by a wide range of international standards and best practice guidelines including those developed by UNESCO, the Royal College of Psychiatrists in London on the mental health of students in the higher education sector, the International Association of Counselling Services, the Irish Universities Quality Board and Professional Codes of Practice in Australia and New Zealand (UNESCO, 2002, 2009; Royal College of Psychiatrists 2003; International Association of Counselling Services, 2000; Irish Universities Quality Board, 2006).

These Guidelines address the following aspects of counselling services in the post-secondary education sector:

- Role and function
- Major responsibilities
- Typical activities and types of service provision including on-line service provision

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[1] In February 2011 the ANZSSA Executive Committee formally endorsed an updated version of the "Guidelines for the Provision of Counselling Services in the Post Secondary Education Sectors in Australia and New Zealand". This is the 3rd iteration of such guidelines endorsed by ANZSSA. This document is reproduced in full in this first issue for 2011 (Volume 37) to bring the document to the attention of the JANZSSA readership. The writing and editorial review team for this document were members of a Heads of Counselling Services forum which draws is participants from those service managers working at post-secondary educational institutions located in Sydney and Canberra. The review and redrafting of these best practice guidelines was the primary activity undertaken by this group during 2009/2010. All are members of ANZSSA and hope that their work is a useful resource to those involved in the provision of counselling services in post-secondary education. Feedback from JANZSSA readers is welcomed. Please send comments to either of the JANZSSA editors (*a.andrews@unsw.edu.au* or *Cathy.Stone@newcastle.edu.au* who will forward to the ANZSSA executive.

- Service management issues relating to professional practice, including provision of staffing, professional staff qualifications, remuneration, workload, professional development and clinical supervision of counsellors
- Service standards relating to resources and physical environment
- Risk assessment/management and occupational health and workforce safety

1. Definitions of terms used in this document

A process that facilitates interventions of a psychological nature, for clients (students or staff) in a one-to-one consultation or within a small group setting and which addresses issues and concerns typically affecting academic participation and performance, study or work (such as educational, psycho-educational, situational, social, relational, cultural, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, mental health, and vocational factors) as requested by the student or staff member.

This focus of counselling is distinct from academic tutoring or assistance that is primarily financial, medical, practical or spiritual.

Clinical Supervision provides an opportunity for on-going reflection by the counsellor on his/her delivery of counselling (to a client or group of clients) and on the development of applied knowledge and experience that informs the "in-session" decision-making and interaction. Through the exposure to an individual clinical supervisor or to a peer supervision group, the counsellor's provision of counselling, therapeutic interventions and referrals is reviewed, ensuring quality in service provision.

2. Role and function of Counselling Services in post-secondary education

2.1. Academic Performance

Post-secondary institutions provide counselling services to students in recognition that factors other than academic ability can significantly affect students' ability to achieve academic goals, their capacity to remain enrolled and their capacity to achieve their academic and personal potential. It is generally recognised that, if unassisted, students affected by these factors can place great demands on the time and energy of academic and general staff in the institution and if unsupported may demonstrate underperformance and deterioration of general wellbeing and mental health.

2.2. Equity, social justice and access support

The adequate provision of student services is seen as a major contribution toward improving the access to post-secondary education and equity of participation for minority populations and improving the experience of students from other nations studying in Australia and New Zealand. Psychosocial counselling and psycho-educational group programs can significantly enhance a student's management of their academic life and assist them in the development of skills relevant to general life and to employment. Provision of these services is particularly required for those whose academic performance may be affected by histories of disadvantage and disability.

Counsellors, because of their adherence to ethical and professional responsibilities may choose to broaden their role from the one to one counselling focus to that of advocate for social justice and principles of inclusion for all members of the student cohort, including those from disadvantaged minorities. Counsellors because of their ethical considerations and adherence to relevant legislation will act to prevent and eliminate discrimination against any person or group based on age, beliefs, culture, gender, marital, legal or family status, intellectual, psychological and physical abilities, race, religion, sexual orientation, and social or economic status. Counsellors may be engaged in the promotion of socially just actions, policies, procedures and practices. They are also likely to act to assist all students to have equitable access to existing resources, services and opportunities.

2.3. Institution responsiveness to mental health issues and risk to self or others

As the student population has become more diverse, counselling services in the post-secondary education are increasingly providing services for students with significant and complex problems including those with existing or emerging major mental health issues. At times, these complex needs can trigger serious situations on campus that contain elements of risk to the health and safety of the student or other people on campus. Counselling services are required to respond to the individual as well as to provide a campus wide response.

Advocating and developing early identification and intervention systems that co-ordinate a campus wide response are central to the safety and well being of the campus community (Barton, 2008). Counselling Service senior team members would ideally be involved in developing campus responses to early identification and intervention policy and procedures.

2.4. Responding to the diversity of the enrolled cohort

Services need to develop culturally appropriate services that address the needs of both indigenous populations (e.g. by minimizing barriers to seeking support), as well as students from other cultures (Westerman, 2004; Chi-Sing, 2006, www.minedu.govt.nz/TertiaryEducationStrategy). This includes employing professional staff from a variety of backgrounds so as to provide points of "identification" for significant groups from the non-dominant cultures as well as ensuring that all staff have appropriate training and sensitivity to work across cultures and in multi-cultural ways.

3. Major responsibilities of Counselling Services in post-secondary education

Counselling Services operate within professional, institutional and community expectations and requirements.

3.1. Legal and Ethical Obligations

Counsellors work within relevant legislative frameworks e.g. duty of care, disability, discrimination, harassment, access, privacy and freedom of information, mandatory reporting of sexual or physical abuse of children, keeping of records and occupational health and safety.

Counsellors who provide psychosocial counselling also abide by the codes of professional conduct established by professional associations and/or Registration Boards.[2]. At times, professional codes of practice will need to be weighed carefully against institutional requirements. Such situations would benefit from professional and ethical discussions with a professionally aligned supervisor or experienced professional peer.

3.2. Planning, accountability and relevance

Ongoing planning, research and evaluation are essential for determining the relevance of activities and providing accountability for the service. Relevant processes may include:

- Institutional and strategic service planning,
- Regular review of client needs, emerging student issues, service efficacy, client satisfaction and service achievement,
- Formulation and review of service values and practices, policy development and quality, and best practice procedures,
- Support and resources for research, presentations and publications by staff and others around clinical issues, student needs and evaluation of services, and
- Bench marking against national and International service standards.

4. Typical activities of Counselling Services in post-secondary education

Counselling Services may provide a range of activities. The specific activities offered will depend on the structures and role of the individual Service and the requirements of the institution (Barton, 2008).

Specific services may include:

- Individual, couple and group
- Assessment, treatment and referral
- Focused psychological strategies
- Specialist psychological treatment for high prevalence presentations
- Generalist psychological treatments

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[2] Examples include:
AASW Code of Ethics (http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/92)
Association of NZ Social Work (http://anzasw.org.nz/sw-in-nz/code-of-ethics/excerpt/)
APS Code of Ethics (http://www.psychology.org.au/about/ethics/#s1)
NZPS Code of Ethics (http://www.psychology.org.nz/Code_of_Ethics)

- Linkages and referral for complex presentations

- To assist with orientation and transition to first year undergraduate or postgraduate or research participation
- To enhance the student experience at university
- To promote and develop student wellbeing
- To meet needs of under-served or minority populations
- To provide specific knowledge and skills for addressing psychological or educational difficulties
- To promote graduate attributes

- Counselling Services can also play a role in providing support for reasonable adjustments in regards to learning demands/requirements for students who have a diagnosed mental illness or who may need assessment or a referral for assessment.
- Some Counselling Services may be able to provide some basic assessment for students but should ensure that these students are aware of and have the option of being referred to the appropriate Disability Service/Centre for registration of their condition.
- Counsellors may also be required in some instances to provide letters/documentation to assist students with learning accommodations such as extensions of assignments or exam conditions.

- To provide programs and activities designed to meet the needs of the student community or university community as a whole and that further the strategic goals and direction of the post secondary education provider

- To provide consultation with and education of academics, residential and other institutional staff regarding contact with challenging or troubled students
- To liaise with mental health agencies and providers outside the institution for the purposes of referral of students to specialised help as required
- To participate in committees and working parties that address the student experience; planning and policy development and which directly impacts on student wellbeing

- To use knowledge of student life, to inform and foster awareness of important issues within the institution for the benefit of all students

- To provide underperforming students with appropriate counselling and referral options for academic guidance
- To communicate when necessary with the university on behalf of the student with good cause for special consideration concerning assessment (late or missed), late withdrawal etc.
- To assist in the provision of programs or other support appropriate to the needs of students failing to make adequate academic progress

- To respond as required by the institution's emergency management plan
- To contribute to the development of behavioural risk management by developing student safety plans
- To assist students and staff to manage both individually and collectively any concerns following a serious or critical incident
- To provide effective referral pathways between the institution's Counselling Service and the local community services

- To give professional advice to institution management as required

In general, counselling services in post-secondary education cannot provide twenty-four hour x seven day per week (24/7) risk assessment and management options for mental health emergencies. Local community after-hours mental health services have staff rostered and trained for mental health risk assessment and management of such emergencies. They also have direct access to the full range of health support and care options required by sufferers of serious mental health episodes. The appropriate role is to ensure that pathways between the Counselling Service and the appropriate community services are effective and clearly identified.

If a 24/7 counselling response is required, appropriate remuneration and conditions should be provided for staff as per the relevant award.

5. Professional practice in Counselling Services in post-secondary education

5.1. Qualifications/training/supervision

Anyone who has psychosocial counselling as all or part of their role needs to demonstrate appropriate qualifications, training and experience.

- Minimum professional qualifications required are graduate but preferably post-graduate in psychology, social work, counselling or comparable profession, with considerable relevant work experience subsequent to their initial qualification, and the capacity to independently manage assessment and treatment without reliance on close supervision.

- If an institution chooses to fill a counsellor position with someone who is yet to complete an appropriate qualification, intensive supervision is considered essential and professionally appropriate. This may entail daily supervision (if in a full time position or *pro rata* otherwise) of the one-to-one and small group counselling by an appropriately qualified, trained, and experienced professional such as psychologist/social worker. The supervisor will be deemed appropriate to supervise by the relevant professional body. Also see Section 6.5.

- If full registration (e.g. as a psychologist), appropriate qualifications and supervised experience are yet to be obtained (this would normally occur within one year of appointment) the employee would normally be identified as an intern counsellor and the service clients would normally be made aware of the level of experience, qualifications, training limitations and supervision provided, prior to the initial interview.

- A workplace induction program for new counselors is essential and would normally include a period of close supervision and familiarisation with specific issues related to the institutional context and policies.

5.2. Position classification and remuneration

In order to attract and retain competent staff in Counselling Services it is relevant to benchmark the position classifications and remuneration with industry standards that cover psychologists and other professional staff employed in the mental health sector.

5.3. Workload

As recommended under international guidelines provided by the International Association of Counselling Services, it is important that:

- Staff members have a balanced workload that affords time for all aspects of their professional functioning ensuring that there is adequate time to be involved in consultation/negotiation, record keeping, case management, professional development, administration, consultancy, research relevant to student issues or service delivery and other related functions as outlined in Section 4. Work allocations might sensibly include (60% individual counseling, 30% workshop planning and delivery or other service delivery strategies such as systemic interventions, and 10% administrative tasks and requirements).

5.4. Professional development

Professional associations and Registration Boards require maintenance of high standards of professional practice by counsellors and for this purpose demonstrated continuing professional development is required each year.

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Counsellors, and the institutions for which they work, share the responsibility of maintaining the professional skill level and currency of knowledge required by counsellors.

In this context, it is recommended that a minimum of five days per year per full time staff member (or equivalent pro rata for part-time staff) of appropriate (externally provided) professional development be allocated via the service resource and policy. This provision also contributes to the development of career path options for counsellors.

5.5. Provision of clinical supervision

Regular professional clinical supervision of a counsellor's practice is required by Registration Boards and professional associations of psychologists and social workers. It is essential that counsellors have access to regular supervision in order to maintain professional registration, best practice excellence within their profession and a high quality service to clients. Clinical supervision should be provided by a senior counsellor who has the experience and skills necessary to provide effective supervision.

Ongoing supervision of each counsellor's casework by an appropriately qualified and experienced senior practitioner is required to:

- Ensure a high quality counselling experiences for service clients,
- Ensure outcomes for the clients that satisfy professional practice expectations,
- Protect and enhance the occupational health, professional development and psychological well-being of the counsellor, and
- Provide a quality measure to support the efficacy of outcomes for the clients of the service.

Supervision should satisfy the requirements deemed by professional associations and Registration Boards. Supervision may include individual, group or joint supervision or other supervision options deemed acceptable by professional associations and Registration Boards. Sufficient time should be allocated for supervision as appropriate to the level of counsellor competence and for the complexity of the client presentation and to meet the requirements of Registration Boards (e.g. psychologists). Supervision provisions should apply to all staff engaging in counselling and psychological intervention. It is essential that counsellors have access to timely supervision when dealing with complex cases or students who are at risk of harm to themselves or others. There may be a need for ongoing additional supervision to assist such cases.

It is standard industry practice to provide additional individual supervision where a particular client requires a risk assessment and safety plan. These situations arise where the counsellor is concerned that the client is at risk of harm to self or at risk of harm from a third party or at risk of harming others. These circumstances require careful management and may mean negotiating with clients who use challenging/difficult/aggressive behaviours. Frequently these situations involve multiple agencies and family members, and may require a duty to disclose to third parties based on the counsellor's judgment related to risk of harm to self or others. These can be very stressful situations for both the client and the counsellor, and may have ramifications for the institution.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Head (or Manager) of the Counselling Service to ensure that all counselling staff receive the appropriate level of clinical supervision taking into account the experience and skills of the individual counsellors and the nature of their case load.

The individual counsellor's need for professional supervision and the provision of professional supervision by the workplace will vary according to a number of factors. The supervision accessed by each counsellor may ultimately be comprised of a combination of supervision provided by the workplace (individual with a senior counsellor, group supervision or other negotiated options) or sourced privately by the counsellor.

5.6. Placement of post graduate students

Post graduate students who undertake a placement in a post secondary counselling setting should:

- Have prior counselling experience in a clinical setting before undertaking their post graduate studies,
- Have validation of their competence checked prior to agreeing to the placement e.g. referee checks, selection interview and/ or role play interview,
- Have their status as a post graduate student clearly stated e.g. intern psychologist. Students of the service should be able to decline contact and instead request a salaried counsellor, and
- Have adequate supervision as indicated on the training provider's contract with the post secondary counselling service.

5.7. Placement of undergraduate students for project work

From time-to-time counselling services may utilise undergraduates to conduct counselling project work e.g. development of on-line resources, researching student needs.

6. Service provision in Counselling Services in post-secondary education

6.1. Staffing/ student ratio

One (1) counsellor per one thousand (1000) student population per campus is regarded internationally as the minimum for educational institutions that require their counselling practitioners to provide a range of counselling and welfare services in addition to personal counselling; or to provide sole practitioner services; or for situations where the employed practitioner provides services to more than one campus.

Where an institution has, in addition to a personal counselling service, separate academic and career counselling services, and employs personal counsellor/s to provide only psychosocial counselling, a minimum of one (1) counsellor per three thousand (3000) student population per campus is acceptable for most student/staff populations (International Association of Counselling Services Accreditation Standards for University & College Counselling Centres, 2010). This ratio may not be adequate in student/staff populations composed of high proportions of under-served, disadvantaged or minority populations.

The efficient and effective functioning of a Counselling Service requires support staff for reception and administrative duties and relief when permanent staff are absent or on leave.

6.2. Service accessibility

Ease of access to counselling services is important for students enrolled in post-secondary institutions, e.g. location, design of building, and availability of providers. Note Section 7.4 for flexible access options through use of on-line technology.

Ideally students should be seen by a counsellor as soon as practical. Ideally this would be within three working days of the request. It is recommended that a maximum waiting time for a first counselling appointment (i.e. not simply a triage appointment) is not more than ten working days. Improved access to the service can be achieved where possible by the use of emergency appointments, brief or drop-in appointments, unbooked appointment options (e.g. drop in clinics), waiting lists and utilising vacancies caused by cancellations. Duty counsellors may also be used for immediate triage or brief consultations. It is recognized that some of these strategies are more difficult to apply in small institutions due to low staffing levels.

6.3. Accommodation standards (International Association of Counselling Services, 2000).
"students in distress coming to student services should find a welcoming and comfortable environment within which to resolve their difficulties….. appropriate, accessible and sufficient spaces for …
individual student services… space provided should be soundproof and allow for discreet access by students"(Irish Universities Quality Board, p 46-47 2006).

The location, accessibility, layout, provision of resources and comfort of furnishings contribute significantly to students' perception of how professional, accessible, private, confidential and 'safe' the counselling service is perceive to be. Similarly the layout and furnishings provided also convey important messages about the values underpinning the service and how valued the service is by the institution.

Issues to consider with accommodation include:

- Discrete location. A service that is physically separated from the institution's administrative, security and educational areas enhances student perception of confidentiality and the separation of functions.
- Access for students with a disability
- Number of rooms. Change of room from session to session is disruptive to the counselling process for both the client and the counsellor. It is preferable if counsellors can work in the same room on an ongoing basis.
- Room design. Rooms dedicated for the purpose of counselling are designed so that they are safe from the possibility of interruption, are private and adequately soundproofed.
- Room size. Counselling rooms that are at minimum 13m2 and preferably 16m2 are able to serve as both an office and an interview room and provide the required professional standards for safety, privacy and confidentiality. The counsellor should be able to position themselves closest to the exit door within the interview area to respect occupational health and safety concerns.
- Furnishings. Furnishings need to create an atmosphere conducive to counselling. More generally, the basic requirements for furniture in a counselling room that is also used as the counsellor's office

include three armchairs, a workstation, filing cabinet and a small bookcase. To meet occupational health and safety requirements, both the workstation and armchairs should be ergonomically safe in design. Furniture choice also needs to take into account that students and staff may range in size from light/slight build to very tall or wide and heavier.

- Reception and waiting areas. Privacy is important in these areas to maintain confidentiality.
- Records. Professional standards require that client related files are kept in a secure central location, easily accessed by all counsellors. Consideration should be given to moving services to electronic record keeping reflecting best practice. Professional considerations include the need to meet professional and legislative requirements for record creation, maintenance, disposal and storage[3].
- A room dedicated to providing skills building workshops and psycho educational seminars is highly recommended. This space should provide privacy, be soundproofed, well ventilated and have good lighting. Such a space can also be used for group focused interventions, and staff meetings.
- Other space. A library/ information resource area for students can be useful. If psychological testing is done in the service, an area suitable for individual and group testing would be relevant.
- Staff training and supervision facilities. Such facilities should enable direct observation, and or audio-visual recording and playback facilities.

Recent trends to integrate student services have resulted, in some instances of co-located student services in 'a student hub' or 'learning commons style' environment designed to provide integrated services with a multi-disciplinary team including counselling and psychological services. In these circumstances it is a risk that a counselling service (along with disability and welfare services) will be perceived as no different to other student services in the types of services they deliver. However it is likely that the other co-located student services will be more focused on the provision of information with fewer requirements for confidentiality and privacy.

While the co-location of services offers many benefits to the student experience and may facilitate access to services, there are a few issues that ANZSSA recommends are considered in the planning phase.

The counselling accommodation needs to reflect legislated professional requirements and be sensitive to the fact that students attending for counselling and psychological services are:

- commonly distressed, severely depressed, highly anxious or may in some instances be actively suicidal or psychotic;
- sometimes assisted by a university staff member or fellow student to an urgent/unscheduled appointment because they have been observed behaving in ways that cause concern or alarm;
- increasingly needing behavioural or emotional containment which may require the presence of campus security;
- increasingly needing urgent assessment by the local acute care community based mental health workers, and or a psychiatrist who may attend the counselling service to do that assessment;
- sometimes requiring an involuntary medical admission (post professional and medical assessment). In such cases police and an ambulance will most likely be called to facilitate this admission to a hospital psychiatric ward;
- afraid of being stigmatized by their mental illness or by being seen attending the service.

The above circumstances occurring in an open plan accommodation shared by a number of services would at best be distracting for others and at worst experienced as distressing, professionally inappropriate and possibly traumatizing for onlookers. It might also 'discourage or put off' other students who were potential counselling service attendees.

Students are often ambivalent about taking action to see a counsellor. This is especially event in their first visit. They can be greatly encouraged to overcome this ambivalence to take the necessary first step by a discreet access option and a less than public environment. The perception of privacy is as important as the actual provision of privacy and students need to feel confident that there is respect for their confidentiality. This may not be achieved by a reception desk shared by numerous services.

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[3] See: Guidelines for psychologists published by the APS in the practitioner login area on the APS website: http://www.psychology.org.au/Members/LogIn.aspx

Pearce, Christopher (2009*) Electronic medical records –where to from here?* **Australian Family Physician** Vol. 38, No. 7, July 2009 Downloaded 11/5/2010 from http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/200907/200907pearce.pdf

NHMRC (2004) The regulation of health information privacy in Australia downloaded on 11/5/2010 from http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/file/publications/synopses/nh53.pdf

Each student service requires 'fit for purpose' accommodation. When a shared space for a number of student services is being planned and the counselling service is to be incorporated in such a space, careful consideration of the style of counselling space will avert the potential of inappropriate and unworkable accommodation and expensive retrofitting to provide adequate sound proofing.

Planning considerations:

- Regular changes of rooms/spaces can be disruptive to both the counsellor and student and the counselling process.

- When there are a number of interview rooms shared among members of various services and when these rooms are also used for counselling purposes it is likely that the student will be in a different room each time they visit. This room changing is unsettling to the individual seeking counselling and interferes with the establishment of the therapeutic relationship.

- For some students these changes will disrupt the establishment of necessary rapport and may result in premature drop-out from support options because they are not able to trust the level consistency or privacy that they perceive to be afforded by the environment.

- Shared interview rooms also require booking and this can make service delivery for unscheduled or crisis appointments less able to be accommodated due to reduced flexibility.

- An office arrangement is more professional and as such engenders more trust in the process and is more easily resourced by the counsellor as an atmosphere conducive to achieving effective counselling.

- Counsellors are often required to conduct counselling sessions via the telephone and in the future it is easy to conceive that some counselling will be offered to students via VOIP options such as SKYPE. Open plan office spaces will curtail the capacity of a counselling service to respond to student needs using technology options as the confidentiality and privacy of the student during the counselling process could not be provided.

- It is difficult for counsellors to conduct telephone discussions with a student or to have telephone conversations about students of concern with allied health professionals in a manner that maintains confidentiality in open office environments.

- In an open plan space it would be challenging and potentially stressful for the counsellor to frame the conversation in ways that protect confidentiality.

- As many telephone contacts are spontaneous, or occur outside scheduled appointments the need to book private space for this purpose is disruptive, may cause additional stress to counsellors and have implications for effective use of time.

As an allied health profession, a counselling service has more in common with medical consulting rooms than an information service. Therefore an office designed for purpose with appropriate sound proofing and with relevant resources provides for professionally appropriate engagement.

6.4. Information technology

Counsellors and service administrative staff require access to computers, software and support for internet access, diary scheduling, record keeping, data storage/file management, research, and publication activities. Each staff member should have ready access to this equipment at all times.

6.5. On-line counselling and web based psychological services

Post-secondary education includes many learning experiences delivered via virtual classrooms and software that allows for student to student and student to staff interaction. Internet-based psycho-education, self-help counselling and psychological resources can provide increased access for students, and can parallel on-line learning technologies based on self directed learning.

Students are demonstrating an increasing expectation of 24/7 access to information and services and the use of web-based resources goes some way to meet this expectation.

There is growing evidence for the efficacy and effectiveness of services provided with the aid of on-line technologies. Current research has provided evidence for the effectiveness of such treatment for mild to moderate depression and for various forms of anxiety, provided there is counsellor support in conjunction with the internet intervention (Bradley, 2003; Kids Helpline, no date). Counselling Services in the post-secondary environment should make full use of these technologies. Examples of this include:

- A comprehensive counselling service web page including a clear description of the services provided, on-line resources (e.g. tip sheets, podcasts), on-line self directed assessment tools and

psycho educational programs. Many useful on-line resources are available through community agencies and could be linked and made relevant to a post secondary education setting. Additionally links could be made to reputable on-line counselling services which often operate outside normal office hours.

Other evidence based on-line services include:

- Psychological counselling services: either one to one or involving sending a counsellor a problem which can be responded to in a question/answer format for a wider audience
- On line support groups
- Synchronous chat rooms or chat groups
- Access to therapeutic materials e.g. relaxation tapes and books and downloadable versions of self help software
- Psychological testing products and services

The provision of internet-based psychological and counselling services should adhere to the relevant professional guidelines, ethical considerations and codes of practice, with warnings for users that clearly identify the likely context for usefulness and limitations of that service such as:

- Confidentiality limitations of using on-line technologies
- Motivation requirements required to effect change using on-line self help resources
- Efficacy of on-line treatment programs
- Level of severity at which contact with a Doctor or mental health professional is urgently advised
- Possible time delays in on-line response
- Clear guidelines for the use of all services
- How crisis situations will be managed and limitations of the medium for crisis interventions
- What to do if the client or counsellor should have an internet disruption or phone or computer failure during an on-line interaction
- Guidelines for net-etiquette and managing the absence of non-verbal communication
- Counsellor training requirements for adaptation of skills to the medium
- Availability of technical support for users

Counselling services should remain informed about their own and other institutions technological developments and note emerging evidence and guidelines provided by relevant professional associations.

6.6. Security

Duress alarms should be installed in the reception area and be available in counselling rooms to ensure the physical safety of both staff and clients. The duress alarm should be linked with the institution's general security system.

In order to protect the confidential records that are maintained by the service, a secure electronic alarm system for after hours security is desirable.

7. Risk management

7.1. Critical incident management

Counselling services are necessarily part of the institution's risk management strategy including the critical incident response. Critical incidents can be defined as events or situations that have sufficient emotional power to overcome the usual coping abilities of people working in environments where some degree of exposure is expected. Such events are usually outside the normal range of expected situations in the workplace in terms of roles and emotional intensity.

Critical incidents may include major disasters, individual incidents (such as serious workplace accidents, serious assaults, road accidents, suicide or accidental death), distressed, angry or disturbed students, students/staff in a mental health crisis and situations when students/staff threaten harm to themselves or others.

The role of counselling services in such incidents can be diffuse and is influenced by professional standards and statutory obligations. Counselling services contribute more effectively to crises if:

- Their role and institutional expectations of them are clearly identified in policies, procedures and protocols within the institution, and

- Counselling staff are given appropriate training in critical incident management and recovery and are familiar with the institution's broader critical incident response management plan**.**

7.2. Community safety, risk assessment and advice

Institutions are increasingly developing structures and plans that involve early recognition and intervention with situations and people that pose a risk to the safety of members of our community. Counsellors have expertise in the areas of mental health assessment of at-risk individuals and in developing responses to reduce risk. Counsellors should be involved in the development and operation of such plans and structures.

Clear protocols for privacy and information sharing should be developed by institutions to ensure that Counselling services are able to perform the dual role of ensuring community safety whilst providing ethical counselling services to students. A conflict of interest may occur when identified at-risk students are either existing clients of the Counselling service or an assessment is requested. At all times staff and community safety is a priority. Institutions should make provision for the payment of external assessment if forensic expertise is required or staff safety is of concern. It is important that clinical staff do not undertake risk assessments that are beyond their skills and expertise or involve a conflict of interest.

7.3. Legal advice and indemnity

Counsellors may occasionally need institutional support for access to legal or specialist consultations to ensure the best interests of clients, staff and the institution.

Professional indemnity insurance purchased by institutions to cover counselling activities is essential.

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