NEW MEDIA AND ETHICAL CHALLENGES ON CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

New Media has had a positive effect for many in terms of access to social support that may not have been available to them previously. Online counseling is growing in popularity. Many clients in the word cite the ''convenience, flexibility, invisibility and written record'' as reasons they choose online counseling. Online peer support groups have also gained popularity, and offer individuals the opportunity to connect with others who are struggling with issues similar to theirs, such as divorce etc. Nowadays, clinical practice is no longer limited to office-based, in-person meetings with clients. Large numbers of clinical social workers are using video counseling, email chat, social networking websites, text messaging, avatar-based websites, smartphone and other technology to provide clinical services to clients, some of whom they never meet in person (Chester and Glass 2006; Kanani and Regehr 2003; Lamendola 2010; Menon and Miller-Cribbs 2002; Reamer 2012a, 2013a; Zur 2012). The advent of this technology has produced a wide range of ethical challenges related to social workers' application of traditional social work ethics concepts: client informed consent; client privacy and confidentiality; boundaries and dual relationships; conflicts of interest; records and documentation. While these are positive developments in many ways, regrettably, again there is little discussion about the potential losses involved with using online versus face-to-face interactions, and the impact of online counseling and support on relationships. The aim of this research paper is to analyze the new ethical challenges of social worker in the new domain of clinical social work in digital environments.

Keywords: new media, ethics, counseling, social work

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