

Strategies to avoid harm as a psychologist



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Steps to Avoid Harm

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Throughout this paper, there will be two hypothetical situations that will be discussed on how a psychologist can avoid harm. There are seven steps that will be used to try and avoid as much harm as possible when working with patients.

The first hypothetical situation, Larry lost his feet to frostbite during a winter on the streets. He is refusing prosthetics because he is convinced that he will soon have his feet restored because he has the power to grow them back very slowly. The doctor has asked your help in getting this client to accept prosthetics. The second hypothetical situation is you are hired as an industrial/organizational psychologist to a new company with limited startup funds. The company wants you to handle all the employment testing for pre-screening potential employees. The test it wants you to use is free and has good face validity, but there is no documented evidence the test results can be validly applied to the demands of the job.

The first step is to “clarify course requirements and establishing a timely and specific process for providing feedback to students” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). In the first situation, it is important that the psychologist informs Larry about prosthetics. He or she can also answer questions that Larry might have before the any decisions are made. In the second situation the psychologist should talk to the company about how the employment testing cannot be validly applied to the demands of the job. This will allow the company to ask questions about what would be a good test to use.

The second step is “ selecting and using valid and reliable assessment techniques appropriate to the nature of the problem and characteristics of the testee to avoid misdiagnosis and inappropriate services” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). The doctor believes that Larry should get prosthetics, but this is one opinion that might be biased. The psychologist should work with Larry to see if this treatment will benefit him. This is why it is important to fully understand what is going on with the patient before any techniques are used. In the second situation the psychologist can work with the company on what would be a test for hiring employees for that particular job. The psychologist needs to make sure the tests are not biased and will be valid for anyone interested in the job.

The third step is “ when appropriate, providing information beforehand to employees and others who may be directly affected by a psychologist’s services to an organization” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). In the first situation, the doctor was the one who thought it would be best for the psychologist to work with the Larry. It is important that the psychologist explains that there is no guarantee that this technique will be right for Larry and that working in sessions with the patient is required before any decisions are made. The psychologist also needs to inform the doctor of confidentiality. The information he provides to the psychologist will need to be kept confidential unless harm is done to himself or others, or if prosthetics is the right treatment to use.

The psychologist in the second situation would need to prepare a document once a test was found. This document would include the interviews of the individuals applying for the job. The psychologist also needs to make sure

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that no one in the company would have access to the information of the individuals applying to the company. After the document was completed, it would be important that the psychologist sends the information to the person in charge of the process in a confidential manner.

Fisher (2013) states the fourth step is “acquiring adequate knowledge of relevant judicial or administrative rules prior to performing forensic roles to avoid violating the legal rights of individuals involved in litigation” (p. 97).

The psychologist in the first situation needs to be familiar with the hospital or doctor office policies before helping patients and laws that fall under helping patients in a medical setting. It is also important that the psychologist has the best interests for Larry. In the second situation, the psychologist needs to be familiar with the company’s policies and laws that fall under working in a business setting.

The fifth step is “taking steps to minimize harm when, during debriefing, a psychologist becomes aware of participant distress created by the research procedure” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). In the first situation if Larry decides to have prosthetics and the psychologist agrees that the technique is a good fit, there might be stress to learning how to walk with the artificial feet. The psychologist might continue therapy with Larry since he or she has been through the process before getting the prosthetics.

The second situation would deal with the individuals that are taking the test for the company to see if they would be a good fit for the job. Counseling might be needed for the individuals that do not get the job. The psychologist

can recommend another psychologist that can work with the individuals who might be having a hard time in knowing they did not get hired.

The sixth step is “ becoming familiar with local social service, medical, and legal resources for clients/patients and third parties who will be affected if a psychologist is ethically or legally compelled to report child abuse, suicide risk, elder abuse, or intent to do physical harm to another individual” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). In the first situation, before the psychologist would start counseling with Larry, the psychologist would have had him read over a consent form. The consent form would include that their sessions would be confidential unless harm would take place to himself or to others.

In the second situation, the psychologist would include a consent form to give information about the test the individuals would be taking. It will also include that if any harm occurs in the process, the company as well as other services will be informed.

The last step is “ monitoring patient’s physiological status when prescribing medications (with legal prescribing authority), particularly when there is a physical condition that might complicate the response to psychotropic medication or predispose a patient to experience an adverse reaction” (Fisher, 2013, p. 97). In the first situation, Larry might be prescribed medication from the doctor after getting the prosthetics. During the sessions between the psychologist and Larry, the psychologist can monitor him to make sure there are no complications. If he starts acting differently or has an adverse reaction, the psychologist needs to inform the doctor as well as the hospital about how the medication is affecting the patient.

In the second situation, the only way medication would be prescribed is if the individual that did not get the job was seeing a psychiatrist. Psychologists do not prescribe medication.

The two situations followed the seven steps to avoid harm. Not all harm can be completely avoided, but following these steps will help the psychologist in any situation to make sure they can avoid serious consequences that can occur.

References:

Fisher, C. B. (2013). *Decoding the ethics code: A practical guide for psychologists*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.