

Ethics Interface

Nancy Mitchell MA, OTR/L, ATP, CLCP, FIALCP

This column is written as a collaborative effort with Mary Barros-Bailey, journal ethics column panel member, and the editorial support of Roger Weed and Tyron Elliot. The author is grateful for their wisdom and collective experience. We would also like to announce the addition of Dianne Simmons-Grab to the journal's Ethics Interface panel and we welcome her input, guidance, and expertise. A hearty thank you goes out to Ann Wallace for volunteering her time as an ethics panel member since its creation in 2006. Thank you Ann.

The column is meant to be an educational forum for life care planners. It is not designed to offer an authoritative opinion from the editor or editorial board of the *Journal of Life Care Planning*, the board of the International Academy of Life Care Planners (IALCP), or the board of its parent organization, the International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals (IARP), nor is it designed to represent or replace official opinions from the certifying body or other organizations associated with the practice of life care planning.

Ethical Dilemma

I am a life care planner who continues to practice as a nurse in a hospital as I grow my life care planning business. I took a life care planning certification course that gave me an excellent foundation in my work as a life care planner. I attend many workshops specific to nursing that fulfill the continuing education requirements for my certification as a life care planner. Is there a concern if I choose not to attend educational programs specific to forensic work or life care planning?

Response

It is important for all professionals to remain current in their given scope of practice. It is no different for life care planners. Competence in our primary profession certainly contributes to the foundation of our life care plans but it is unlikely to assure competence in life care planning.

It is helpful to refer to the Standards of Practice for Life Care Planners (2006) from the International Academy of Life Care Planners which states in its introduction:

“D. Education/Preparation/Certification

The Life Care Planner must...:

5. Participate in specific continuing education, required to maintain the individual practitioner's licensure or certification within their profession.

6. Obtain continuing education and/or training to remain current in the knowledge and *skills in the field*” (p. 124). (Italics added)

While this does not delineate the exact mix of continuing education specific to life care planning, it does advocate advancing one's knowledge specific to the specialty area of life care planning.

The Commission on Health Care Certification (now known as the International Commission on Health Care Certification/ICHCC) Standards and Examination Guidelines (2007) offers a similar direction to this question in two sections.

Principles and Associated Rules: Principle 9 - Competence:

“Disability examiners and life care planners shall establish and maintain their professional competencies at such a level that their patients receive the benefit of the highest quality of services the credentialed professional is capable of offering“ (p. 41).

Rules of Professional Conduct

R9.2: “Disability examiners and life care planners will continuously strive through reading, attending professional meetings, and taking course instruction to keep abreast of new developments, concepts, and practices that are essential to providing the highest quality of services to their patients” (p. 41).

While it may not be a serious breach of ethics, non-attendance at continuing education specific to life care planning or forensic work is certainly poor business practice. It is likely impossible to keep current in a specialty practice without participating in ongoing education specific to that work. One other practical consideration is that the question of continuing education may well be asked of the life care planner in deposition or trial. It may diminish the life care planner’s standing in the eyes of the trier of fact if little or no time has been spent in continuing education specifically directed to life care planning.

References

Commission on Health Care Certification Standards and Examination Guidelines. (2007). Retrieved July 18, 2009 from <http://www.ichcc.org/chcc%20standards%20and%20guidelines%20manual%20008.pdf/>

International Academy of Life Care Planners. (2006). Standards of practice for life care planners. *Journal of Life Care Planning*, 5(3),123-129.

New Ethical Dilemma

My concern is the proper and ethical way to dispose of medical records sent to me for review when I am retained to do a life care plan. Is it adequate to remove the person’s name from the records and dispose of the rest in recycling?

A response to the above ethical dilemma will be published in the next issue of the *Journal of Life Care Planning*. The *Journal of Life Care Planning* welcomes the submission of real world ethical dilemmas. Submissions will be altered to promote confidentiality and be kept in strict confidence. Please send submissions to nancymitchell4574@yahoo.com.
