

*Ilyssa Swartout, Psy.D.*  
*18205 N. 51<sup>st</sup> Avenue*  
*Building 2, Suite 115*  
*Glendale, Arizona 85308*  
*O – 602-548-1444*  
*VM - 602-463-6854*

**PSYCHOTHERAPIST-PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT**  
**[ARIZONA]**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and patient, and the particular problems you are experiencing. I may use many different methods, but generally my approach invites your close attention to your internal experience, to your perceptions of your world around you, and to the manner in which you pursue or limit making your way. I believe that therapy is a process of experiencing and understanding who you really are and creating a greater sense of personal alignment. In our work, I may invite you to explore by talking about material or experimenting with behaviors. You always have the right to decline or agree to these invitations, and it is appropriate at any time to question what we are doing. However, it is important for you to understand that psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, in order for psychotherapy to be effective, it calls for a very active effort on your part. The more honest, truthful, and genuine you are with me about what you are believing, thinking, feeling, saying/doing, in your daily life outside of my office and with me in my office, the more likely it is that you will really understand yourself, I will really understand you, and we will together help you heal. In the same way, I will be honest with you. In order for therapy to really work, our honesty and genuineness with each other is essential. While I provide expertise regarding how to do meaningful therapy,

you are the source of what is important to you and your level of satisfaction. Since therapy seeks to enhance your ability to care for yourself, I will support your being in charge of yourself. My deepest intention is that you find within yourself a deep and lasting sense of wholeness, worth, and esteem.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. Most clients with whom I meet feel their problems are adequately resolved in 8-12 sessions, and they feel capable of working through the remaining aspects of their concerns without therapy. Some clients return when they have encountered a new aspect of their problem and they would like some help. Since I believe our relationship is an important one, I ask that we talk, face-to-face in session, about ending your therapy before you stop coming. If the ending of our relationship feels clean and clear to both of us, it is much more likely we will feel good about ourselves and the therapy we have completed. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, a better understanding of yourself, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

## **MEETINGS**

My assessment normally occupies the bulk of the first session and may last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services that you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 50-minute session (one appointment hour of 50 minutes duration) per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. **Once an appointment hour is**

**scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions.** If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment. If I can find a time the same week of your missed appointment then I will waive the no show fee.

### **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

My hourly fee is \$200 for the initial (diagnostic) session and \$150 for the 50-minute therapy sessions. A discount is available for individuals not using insurance. In addition to scheduled appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, consulting with other professionals with your permission, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for all of my professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$250 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding as a fact witness only. I require payment in advance and the attorneys involved must commit to a scheduled amount of time. If I am required to be a fact witness in court I contract for quarter day minimum. I do not do disability cases or any paperwork associated with a disability. If you are seeking therapy related to a disability issue I am probably not the best person for you.

### **CONTACTING ME**

Due to my work schedule, I am often not immediately available by telephone. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by an answering machine that I monitor frequently. Please leave a message on this system. I will make every effort to return your call promptly. The system works during standard business hours, five days/week, except on holidays. Please leave your call-back number with your message. I may be away from the office when I receive your message, and therefore be unable to consult your chart for your telephone-contact information. You may also reach me at my voice mail number. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask

for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, one of my colleagues will reply to your message and will put you in touch with the psychologist who is covering for me. Please know that when I am not in the office I may forward all my calls from my office phone to my cellular phone.

### **LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY**

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist. In most situations, I can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written Authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:

- I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together. I will note all consultations in your Clinical Record (which is called "PHI" in my Notice of Psychologist's Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).
- You should be aware that I practice with other mental health professionals and that I employ administrative staff. In most cases, I need to share protected information with these individuals for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.
- I also have a contract with Accurate Medical Billing, Inc, which is the company I use for my billing. As required by HIPAA, I have a formal business associate contract with this business, in which it promises to maintain the confidentiality of this data except as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law. If you wish, I can provide you with the names of these organizations and/or a blank copy of this contract.

- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in this Agreement.
- If a patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

There are some situations where I am permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or Authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning the professional services I provided you, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. I cannot provide any information without your or your legal representative's written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order me to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, I may be required to provide information for it.
- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against me, I may disclose relevant information regarding that patient in order to defend myself.
- If a patient files a worker's compensation claim, and I am providing services related to that claim, I must, upon appropriate request, provide appropriate reports to the Workers Compensation Commission or the insurer.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take actions, which I believe are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and I may have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. These situations are unusual in my practice.

- If I have reason to believe that a child under 18 who I have examined is or has been the victim of injury, sexual abuse, neglect or deprivation of necessary medical treatment, the

law requires that I file a report with the appropriate government agency, usually the Office of Child Protective Services. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.

- If I have reason to believe that any adult patient who is either vulnerable and/or incapacitated and who has been the victim of abuse, neglect or financial exploitation, the law requires that I file a report with the appropriate state official, usually a protective services worker. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
  
- If a patient communicates an explicit threat of imminent serious physical harm to a clearly identified or identifiable victim, and I believe that the patient has the intent and ability to carry out such threat, I must take protective actions that may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If the patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

If such a situation arises, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and I will limit my disclosure to what is necessary.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and I am not an attorney. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

## **PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

Laws and standards of my profession require that I keep Protected Health Information about you in your clinical record. Your clinical record includes information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem impacts on your life, your diagnosis, the goals that we set for treatment, your progress towards those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, any past treatment records that I receive from other providers,

reports of any professional consultations, your billing records, and any reports that have been sent to anyone, including reports to your insurance carrier. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others or where information has been supplied to me by others confidentially, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record, if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, I recommend that you initially review them in my presence, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. If I refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right of review, which I will discuss with you upon request.

In addition, I also sometimes keep a set of Psychotherapy Notes. These Notes are for my own use and are designed to assist me in providing you with the best treatment. While the contents of Psychotherapy Notes vary from client to client, they can include the contents of our conversations, my analysis of those conversations, and how they impact on your therapy. They also contain particularly sensitive information that you may reveal to me that is not required to be included in your Clinical Record. These Psychotherapy Notes are kept separate from your Clinical Record. While insurance companies can request and receive a copy of your Clinical Record, they cannot receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Notes without your written, signed Authorization. Insurance companies cannot require your Authorization as a condition of coverage nor penalize you in any way for your refusal. You may examine and/or receive a copy of your Psychotherapy Notes unless I determine that such access is clinically contraindicated.

If you are coming to see me as part of a couple or family, I keep one file for the unit. If one person's records are subpoenaed it is not viable to separate records and therefore all records will be sent. I do keep separate records for individuals who are part of the couple or family unit if I see them individually during the episode of therapy. However, both the individual and unit records may have to be sent. It is important to know that when seeing a couple, I find it best not to keep secrets if I happen to see each of you individually. Therefore, if you do not want your partner to know something sensitive, please do not tell me during our individual sessions.

Upon termination of your therapy with me, I will maintain your full and complete file for a total of 7 years or, when a minor client has reached the age of 21, whichever is longer. I will not make any attempt to contact you prior to destroying your records, unless I am closing my practice. Files will be destroyed by an insured and bonded, commercial shredding service.

## **PATIENT RIGHTS**

HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Record and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that I amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Record is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about my policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to a paper copy of this Agreement, the attached Notice form, and my privacy policies and procedures. I am happy to discuss any of these rights with you.

## **MINORS & PARENTS**

Patients under 18 years of age who are not emancipated and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child's treatment records. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is sometimes my policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up their access to their child's records. If they agree, during treatment, I will provide them only with general information about the progress of the child's treatment, and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. I will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's authorization, unless I feel that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, I will notify the parents of my concern. Before giving parents any information, I will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections he/she may have.

## **BILLING AND PAYMENTS**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may

involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court which will require me to disclose otherwise confidential information. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

At the time that you fill out the paper work for therapy I will include a form for you to fill out allowing me to charge your credit card under certain circumstances. Please know that if you sign that form to allow me to do that, I will NOT charge your card without your knowledge and permission.

### **INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT**

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While much can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans

will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, I will do my best to find another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy.

You should also be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that I provide it with information relevant to the services that I provide to you. I am required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I am required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire Clinical Record. In such situations, I will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it. By signing this Agreement, you agree that I can provide requested information to your carrier.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end your sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above unless prohibited by contract.

It is also YOUR responsibility to find out from your insurance company if you need an authorization number, if you have a deductible to meet, how much your copay is and the number of sessions they allow. It is helpful if you find out all of this before your first session, as Dr. Swartout instructed you during the initial phone call.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT AND AGREE TO ITS TERMS DURING OUR PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO SERVES AS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HIPAA NOTICE FORM.

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Signed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date