

## **RECORD KEEPING – GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **Guiding Remarks**

Record keeping as referred to in this document relates to patient records and includes; case notes account records, test proformas and test record forms, confidentiality agreements, personal data and patient correspondence.

These guidelines for professional judgment and are not intended to be regulatory.

The guidelines as detailed here should be interpreted in respect of: their aspirational intent, advancement in psychology and in the technology of record keeping.

The professional judgment of the individual psychologist should be used in specific applications.

It is important to highlight that professional judgment is not pre-empted by these guidelines, but rather their intent is to enhance it.

These guidelines are predominantly for use by psychologists in private practice.

“A purpose of record keeping is that it provides a guide to memory.”

### **Who owns patient/client records?**

Ownership of records is a private arrangement between the psychologist and their patient/clients. The information is the patient/client's while the documentation of that information is property of the psychologist.

### **Benefits of record keeping to the psychologist**

1. The key benefit is to the patient/client.  

Records allow a psychologist to document and review the delivery of the psychological service provided. The nature and extent of the records will vary depending on the type and purpose of the service.
2. Proper record keeping benefits the psychologist by providing a ready resource which can be a guide to; the planning and implementation of an appropriate course of treatment/service, progress reviews and supervision and/or self monitoring purposes.

3. Maintenance of appropriate records may also be relevant for a variety of institutional, financial and legal; purposes. Adequate records may be required for receipt of third party payment for psychological services.
4. Well documented records may help protect psychologists from professional liability, if they become involved in legal proceedings or questions of practice ethics. In these circumstances, the principal issue will be the professional action of the psychologist as reflected in part by the records.
5. Psychologists are understandable concerned that, at times, client/patient information may be required to be disclosed against the wishes of the psychologist or client, and that it may be released to persons not qualified to interpret such information.

### **What records should be maintained?**

1. Records include any information, including that stored in a computer, that may be used to document the nature, delivery, progress or results of psychological services. Records may be revised and duplicated.
2. Records of psychological services minimally include:
  - Identifying data
  - Dates of services
  - Types of services
  - Fees
  - Assessment intervention plan
  - Consultation notes
  - Reports generated and any written consent to the release of information.
3. Records kept should be maintained as accurate, current, and pertinent to the psychological services delivered. The detail is sufficient to permit planning for continuity should another psychologist need to take over the delivery of services in the event of death, disability or retirement.
4. Records kept beyond minimum as described above, for example, are at the professional judgment of the psychologist. The psychologist takes into account the nature of the services, the source of the information recorded and its intended use according to their professional obligation. What records the psychologist keeps depends in part upon the nature of the service provided.

## **Construction and control of records**

1. Records need to be contained within a storage system that protects their Confidentiality. The psychologist must take reasonable steps to establish and maintain the confidentiality of information arising from their own delivery of psychological service, or the services of others working under their supervision.
2. Psychologist have ultimate responsibility for the content of their records and the records of those under their supervision. This requires the principal psychologist oversee the design and implementation of record keeping procedures and monitor their observance.
3. Psychologists maintain control over their client records in respect of the policies of the institutions in which they work. In circumstances where it is no longer feasible to have control over records the psychologist seeks to make appropriate arrangements for transfer.
4. Records are organised in a manner that facilitates their use by the psychologist and other authorised persons. As case notes are an aid to memory it is judicious and common sense to be prompt in maintaining them.
5. As records can be maintained in a variety of media, their utility, confidentiality and durability needs to be assured.
6. Control of records provides protection against the misuse of records and case material.

## **Retention of Records**

1. How long are records retained?

It is recommended that client records be kept for a minimum of 10 years after the last contact with the clients. If the client is a minor it is recommended that the record period be extended until 10 years after the client reaches age 18 years.

2. Under what conditions can records be archived?

All records, both active and inactive are maintained safely with proper security from access and from which timely retrieval is possible.

3. Should a psychologist take over another psychologist's records?

On this matter it is up to the individual choice and discretion of the psychologist, who may or may not want to inherit records.

### **Disposal of records**

When records are to be disposed of, this is done in a manner that protects confidentiality.

### **Disclosing of Outdated Information**

Psychologists are attentive to situations in which recorded information has become outdated. Such information may then be deemed invalid. The disclosure of information that has become outdated has the potential to have adverse effects, and thus highlighting that it is outdated and has limited utility is important.

### **Disclosure of Record Keeping Procedures**

When appropriate psychologists may inform their clients of the nature and extent of their record keeping procedures. This information includes a statement of the limitations of the confidentiality of the records.

### **Can the psychologist charge a fee for the review or reproduction of records?**

A reasonable fee may be charged for the review and reproduction of records. It is not reasonable to withhold records that are needed for valid medical or healthcare purposes solely because the client has not paid for prior services.