



# Module 5:

# Ethical Aspects of the E-Tools E-consulting with Focus on Differences from Classic Settings

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# THERAPY 2.0 Training Course: 9 Modules

1. Introduction

2. The spectrum of technology-enhanced information & communication

3. Characteristics of computer-mediated communication in counselling and therapy

4. Legal aspects

5. Ethical aspects of the e-tools / e-consulting

6. Economic and financial aspects

7. Technical competences for an online advisor, counsellor or therapist

8. Psychological aspects and competences in online interventions

9. ICT based counselling for asylum seekers, refugees and unaccompanied minors

# Module overview

- The module identifies ethical issues and studies of efficacy or effectiveness regarding the use of communication technologies in counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions through the use of ICT.
- It will be shown some recommendations identified in the literature for online clinical practice in general and in some special situations (e.g., crisis interventions; malfunctions in technology)
- Frequent doubts of advisors, counsellors and psychotherapists with regard to computermediated client relationships, such as security, confidentiality, lack of non-verbal communication, cost/payment are discussed with reference to both scientific research results and practical experience.

# Module objectives

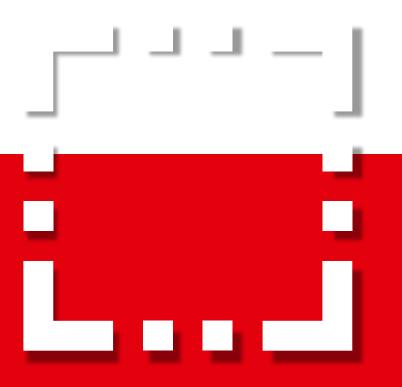
# Upon completion of this course, the learner should be able to

- ✓ identify ethical issues in the online clinical practice;
- ✓ understand the impact of the technology-based communication for therapeutic or counselling;
- ✓ know relevant literature regarding efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies;
- ✓ know the literature recommendations on how to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace;
- ✓ identify how to act in different situations that could arise in the online clinical practice;
- ✓ implement skills useful to overcome the challenges of technology-based communication.



# Module outline

- Unit 5.1: Introduction/Contextualization
- Unit 5.2: Confidentiality, issues of privacy, identification of client(s) and therapist(s)
- Unit 5.3: Quality assurance
- Unit 5.4: Licensing
- Unit 5.5: Issues related to crisis interventions
- Unit 5.6: Technology in online-therapy
- Unit 5.7: Computer skills of the online therapists
- Unit 5.8: Asynchronous interventions
- Unit 5.9: Boundaries
- Unit 5.10: Cost/payment



# Unit 5.1 Introduction/ Contextualization

### **Section Outline**

- Examples of ethical issues
- Some questions for you
- Implications



# Examples of ethical issues



**Licensing for practice** 



Validity of the data delivered via digital networks

Credentialing

**Crisis interventions and risky clinical situations** 

Client's and counsellor's identification

interventions and risky clinical situations

Potential misuse of software applications

Lack of awareness of location-specific factors

**Privacy concerns** 

Impact on the therapeutic relationship

**Development of a therapeutic relationship** 

# Some questions for you...

or state other than the treatment provider, in which jurisdiction must the counsellor or therapist be licensed?

What if the client resides in one country, but checks her email while travelling in another altogether?

If problems or violations in the course of treatment occur, which regulatory body has jurisdiction?

(Baker & Ray, 2011, p. 343).

Even if a clinician uses encrypted email, how can she be assured that no one else can access the client's email account?



# Implications

Seems important to establish guidelines for best practices...



# Unit 5.2 Confidentiality, issues of privacy, identification of client(s) and therapist(s)

### **Section Outline**

- Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 1
- Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 2
- Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 3



### Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 1

Intervention must always comply with the ethical principles and deontological and legal norms enshrined in the code of ethics of the Professional Association of each country or of more general associations.



### Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 2

- To obtain informed consent, when the limits of privacy and confidentiality in the intervention are at risk;
- To conduct the first interview face-to-face;
- To respect the client's anonymity;
- To have a physical address;
- To facilitate the identification of the professional.

(Loue, 2016; Richards & Viganó, 2013)



### Recommendations to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace 3

Various professional counselling and therapy accrediting associations have produced guidelines for online clinical practice that are regularly revised with the growing body of evidence from practice and research.

### For a review see, among others:

Richards & Viganó, 2013; http://www.apa.org/ethics/education/telephonestatement.aspx



### Unit 5.3 Quality assurance

### **Section Outline**

- Efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies or counselling 1
- Efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies or counselling 2



# 5.3 Efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies or counselling 1

"A growing body of knowledge to date is positive in showing that online counselling can have a similar impact and is capable of replicating the facilitative conditions as face-to-face encounters" but "a need remains for stronger empirical evidence to establish efficacy and effectiveness and to understand better the unique mediating and facilitative variables".



(Richards and Viganó, 2013, p. 994)

# 5.3 Efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies or counselling 2

The impact of the various types of technology-based communication for therapeutic or counselling has been studied through systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

- Andrews, Cuijpers, Craske, McEvoy, & Titov (2010);
- Barak et al. (2008);
- Chester & Glass (2006);
- Dowling & Rickwood (2013);
- Gainsbury & Blaszczynski (2011);
- Griffiths & Christensen (2006);
- Hanley & Reynolds (2009);
- Heinlen, Welfel, Richmond, & Rak (2003);

- Kaltenthaler et al. (2004);
- Machado et al. (2016);
- Manzoni, Pagnini, Corti, Molinari, & Castelnuovo (2011);
- Newman et al. (2011);
- Postel, de Haan, & De Jong (2008);
- Richards & Viganó (2013);
- Shaw & Shaw (2006).



# Unit 5.4 Licensing

### **Section Outline**

- Still a new field
- Licensed therapists and counsellors



### 5.4. Still a new field

Considering that online therapy and counselling is a new field, state boards, federal institutions, and professional associations are still evaluating their policies, and regulations are still forming.



# 5.4. Licensed therapists and counsellors

- Need to understand and to observe the most update version of the policies and regulations
  - follow the professional association's (e.g., local, state, national or international) ethics and bylaws and rules/regulations that regulate their profession.
- Considering that online therapy and counselling is a new field, state boards, federal institutions, and professional associations are still evaluating their policies, and regulations are still forming.



## 5.4 Licensed therapists and counsellors

• Licensed therapists and counsellors should follow the professional association's (e.g., local, state, national or international) ethics and bylaws and rules/regulations that regulate their profession. Considering that online therapy and counselling is a new field, state boards, federal institutions, and professional associations are still evaluating their policies, and regulations are still forming. Despite that, professionals need to understand and to observe the most update version of the policies and regulations.

### Unit 5.5

# Issues related to crisis interventions

### **Section Outline**

- Crisis interventions
- Recommendations



### 5.5 Crisis intervention

As in the traditional setting, it is always possible to be contacted online by the person who is currently in crisis.

Even though there are numerous telephone hotlines especially created for crisis intervention that have proven efficient, it is preferable to be able to make real contact with the person or to refer the person in crisis to available mental health services.

Remember, it is therapist's ethical duty and legal obligation to intervene when the client is a threat to her/himself or others.

### 5.5 Recommendation

Recommendations for crisis interventions in online therapy are:

- the crisis should not be treated online
- the therapist should know the real identity and location of the client
- the therapist and the client should agree on crisis procedure in advance
- the client should provide an emergency contact
- the therapist should investigate community resources in the client's area

### Unit 5.6

# Technology in online-therapy.

### **Section Outline**

- Ethical issues caused by technology malfunction(s)
- What to do when technology fails



### 5.6 Ethical issues caused by technology malfunction(s)

Unlike the traditional f2f therapy, e-therapy has a different medium that enables the communication: the technology.

Although today's technology is rather reliable, malfunctions are possible (failure in internet connection, in the platform supporting the communication, and/or software malfunctions)

If the internet connection fails, the therapeutic conversation is abruptly interrupted. Such an experience can be confusing and upsetting both to the client and the therapist.

- Has the client ended the conversation on purpose because of something being said?
- Is he or she in some kind of crisis?

Similar questions can be raised by the client, and the therapeutic relationship can subsequently be damaged.

## 5.6 What to do when technology fails?

The available literature suggests that the therapist using technology-based communication and the client should set up an agreed-upon procedure in the event of technology failure.

The procedure should include:

- 1. who is responsible for reinitiating contact
- 2. within what time frame
- 3. what is an additional channel of contact (email, messaging, phone call).

### Unit 5.7

# Computer skills of the online therapists

### **Section Outline**

Technology-based communication: skills and competencies



# 5.7 Technology-based communication: skills and competencies

In general, therapists using technology-based communication should have an additional set of skills and competencies compared to traditional therapists.

- A therapist using technology-based communication must be skilled in the technology that supports the communication, skills such as: typing skill, speed, and accuracy, be familiarized with computer and web-based technologies.
- Security and confidentiality are key issues of online therapy and it is the therapist's duty to understand and educate the client on software/techniques that provide data security and clinical record confidentiality.

# Unit 5.8

# Asynchronous interventions

### **Section Outline**

Asynchronous interventions



# 5.8 Asynchronous interventions

Asynchronous interventions are being criticized for their lack of non-verbal cues.

Even though there is scientific evidence that lack of non-verbal communication can have its benefits (such as in cases when nonverbal communication is used to manipulate the therapist), it is recommended that online therapists receive training in the use of emotions, widely used internet acronyms as well as to learn how to explicitly state their emotions in words.

**Unit 5.9** 

# Boundaries

### **Section Outline**

Technology issues vs boundaries of online therapy



# 5.9 Technology issues vs boundaries of online therapy

Technology issues are in a way related to the boundaries of online therapy.

Technology, Internet, social media are easily accessible thus allowing for the misconception that the therapist/counsellor is available at any time.

The therapist should communicate with the client on the specific boundaries of their relationship and inform the clients on them, such as:

- the frequency of the contact
- duration of session(s)
- availability of the therapist outside of agreed time
- limits regarding interaction through social media
- cost/payment

# Unit 5.10 Cost/payment

### **Section Outline**

Cost of online therapy



# 5.10 Cost of online therapy

- The cost of online therapy should be transparent and in accordance with the regulation of executive/normative bodies, whenever they exist.
- Since online therapy is a relatively new form of therapy it is seldom covered by insurance policies.
- Online therapy in the majority of cases is privately paid and agreement on payment should be reached in order to protect both the client and the therapist.



### Discussion



Please discuss in plenary: Ethical issues regarding the use of communication technologies for therapeutic purposes.



Please discuss in plenary:

Does your Professional Association has a stand or official code of ethics regarding the online therapy and what are your thoughts about it?

Is it in accordance with recommendations identified in the literature to deal with the limitations and challenges of the cyberspace?

### Discussion



Please discuss in plenary: Ethical issues regarding the use of communication technologies for therapeutic purposes.



Please identify:

Recommendations identified in the literature to deal with the limitations and challenges of the cyberspace.

#### Exercises



Therapists using technology-based communication should have an additional set of skills and competencies compared to traditional therapists.

Please list some of them.

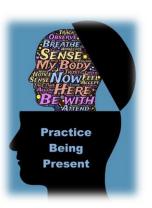
What are the ways in which you can set specific boundaries and how they differ from traditional therapy? Please explain



## 5

## Important aspects to remember





## Check your knowledge

- 1. Identify ethical issues in the online clinical practice.
- 2. Explain the possible impact of the technology-based communication for therapeutic or counselling.
- 3. Present relevant literature regarding efficacy or effectiveness of interventions based on communication technologies;
- 4. What are the main results of the literature mentioned in the previous question?
- 5. List some literature recommendations on how to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace concerning ethical issues.
- 6. Explain the recommendations for crisis interventions in online therapy setting.

### Results

- 1. Answer to question 1
- 2. Answer to question 2
- 3. Answer to question 3
- 4. Answer to question 4
- 5. Answer to question 5
- 6. Answer to question 6



- Identify ethical issues regarding online clinical practice.
- Some of the ethical issues that can arise during online clinical practice are related with the therapeutic process, as the confidentiality, the validity of the data that is delivered via digital networks and the impact on the development and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship; the counsellor/therapist, as the credentialing and licensing for practice, his or her identification and the adequacy of the counsellor/therapist interventions; the client, as his or her identification; and with other factors as jurisdiction, interventions in crisis or risky situations, the potential misuse of software applications, and the lack of awareness of location-specific factors.

- Explain the possible impact of the technology-based communication for therapeutic or counselling process.
- The specific characteristics of the use of technology as a mean of communication in therapeutic or counselling process may influence the course and the efficacy of these processes.
- The online communication methods diminish the control of the counselors and the therapists during the process, which may jeopardize privacy and confidentiality of their clients. Additionally, it is easier to both counsellor/therapist and clients manipulate the data delivered to each other, which can affect the establishment and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship. Other negative aspects of online counselling relates to internet malfunctions, that can abruptly shut down the communication between the two interveners during a therapeutic session, and to the establishment of boundaries, once it can build the belief that the counsellor/therapist is always available.
- Despite that, online therapy or counselling can have several advantages, as the long-distance sessions that can happen during travel periods, the quicker response in crisis, reduced travel costs, and the possibility of providing support to persons with reduced mobility.

- Refer relevant literature regarding efficacy or effectiveness of therapies based on communication technologies.
- Some of the studies focused on assessing efficacy and effectiveness of therapies based on communication technologies are:
  - Andrews, Cuijpers, Craske, McEvoy, & Titov (2010); Barak et al. (2008);
  - Chester & Glass (2006); Dowling & Rickwood (2013);
  - Gainsbury & Blaszczynski (2011); Griffiths & Christensen (2006);
  - Hanley & Reynolds (2009); Heinlen, Welfel, Richmond, & Rak (2003);
  - Kaltenthaler et al. (2004); Machado et al. (2016);
  - Manzoni, Pagnini, Corti, Molinari, & Castelnuovo (2011); Newman et al. (2011);
  - Postel, de Haan, & De Jong (2008); Richards & Viganó (2013);
  - and Shaw & Shaw (2006).

- What are the main results of the literature mentioned in the previous question?
- Due to the heterogeneity of the data found in the above-mentioned studies, their conclusions should be interpreted with caution. The most recent studies have been reporting that the online counselling can be as effective as face-to-face sessions, once it is capable of replicating the same conditions of presential sessions. Despite that, the need for stronger empirical evidence is still reported in what concerns to the assessment of the efficacy and effectiveness of this type of therapy and to better understand its mediating and facilitative variables.

- List some literature recommendations on how to deal with the challenges of the cyberspace concerning ethical issues.
- American Psychological Association (2017). APA statement on services by telephone, teleconferencing and internet. Available online in http://www.apa.org/ethics/education/telephone-statement.aspx
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- Richards, D., & Viganó, N. (2013). Online Counseling: A Narrative and Critical Review of the. Literature, Journal of Clinical Psychology, 69(9), 994-1011.

- Explain the recommendations for crisis interventions in online therapy setting.
- It is always preferable to be able to make real contact with the person or to refer the person in crisis to available mental health services. The therapist should know the real identity and location of the client and they should agree on crisis procedure in advance. The client should provide an emergency contact, and the therapist should investigate community resources in the client's area. If the client is a threat to her/himself or others it is therapist's legal obligation to intervene.

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## 5 Ethical Aspects of the E-Tools / E-consulting

## Imprint

**Project:** Therapy 2.0

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## End of module



# Congratulations! You have completed this module!















