

# HARFORD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

**“Healthy People in a Healthy Environment”**

## **CODE OF ETHICS**



Division of Behavioral Health  
120 S. Hays Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Bel Air, Maryland 21014  
410-877-2340

## INTRODUCTION

The Harford County Health Department's Division of Behavioral Health (Division) is proud to present their newly revised Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics (Code) is a general guide for how employees shall act, perform their work, and protect the Division by complying with all legal and regulatory requirements.

Health care is a highly regulated and complex business and there are times when the right choice seems neither simple nor apparent. Yet, at all times, actions of Division employees must be guided by a clear understanding of state and federal legal and regulatory requirements, departmental policies and procedures, and the Division's mission and values.

These basic guidelines for standards of care are spelled out in this Code, which is a general guide for applying legal and ethical practices to everyday work and situations that may arise.

Division employees, which encompass trainees, interns and contract workers, are required to read, understand and abide by the standards of this Code. This Code makes it clear that we do not tolerate illegal or unethical behavior in any of our business dealings.

Compliance is everyone's responsibility; we have a duty to seek advice when necessary and to report actual or suspected misconduct. Every day, the Division earns its reputation with the words chosen, the actions taken and the decisions employees make. The communication of this Code is part of our ongoing effort to reinforce our commitment to honesty, fairness and integrity.

### **MISSION**

The **MISSION** of the Harford County Health Department's Division of Behavioral Health is to ensure the residents of Harford County, who are at risk of, or suffer from, mental, behavioral, or addictive disorders, have access to a continuum of behavioral health services.

### **VISION**

The **VISION** of the Harford County Health Department's Division of Behavioral Health is to enhance the well-being of the community, by applying a behavioral health service delivery model that fosters resiliency, freedom from addiction and the attainment of psychological recovery.

## **CORE VALUES**

The **VALUES** of the Division of Behavioral Health:

**1. DIGNITY and RESPECT:**

- a. To treat everyone in a dignified and respectful manner.
- b. To identify, address and minimize barriers to treatment.

**2. COLLABORATION:**

- a. To understand that partnerships, trust and teamwork are vital to the development and application of services.
- b. To recognize the contributions and perspectives of others.

**3. PERSON-CENTERED CARE**

- a. To serve the ever-changing needs of the community, while honoring ethnic, religious and cultural diversities.
- b. To be attentive to the individualized needs of the community.

**4. ACCOUNTABILITY:**

- a. To be accountable through continuous quality/performance improvement.
- b. To always protect the privacy of others.

**5. GROWTH and DEVELOPMENT:**

- a. To promote health literacy and informed choice.
- b. To invest in our community and ourselves through professional development and educational opportunities.
- c. To believe opportunities for growth are available and obtainable.

## **PRINCIPLES**

### **(Part 1)**

The Division's Code of Ethics is based on the principles listed below. These principles provide an important foundation to guide behavior, both individually and in interpersonal relationships. All employees, at the Division, are required to read and comply with the Code. Employees who have questions regarding the Code should direct the questions to his/her Supervisor or to the Division Director.

#### **Quality of Care**

The Division is committed to providing competent and compassionate care, to respect and safeguard the dignity of the clients served, and to provide the information necessary so that clients can make informed decisions about their care. The Division aims to serve the whole person inclusive of their spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical needs by being culturally and linguistically competent, sensitive and aware.

#### **Law and Regulations**

The Division strives to operate in accordance with all laws and regulations. These laws and regulations apply to all areas of the Division, including client referrals, employment, collaborative relationships, billing and payment practices, the environment, health and safety and dealings with payers and regulatory agencies.

#### **Workforce Development**

The Division is dedicated to developing a work environment where employees are treated honestly and respectfully; where their health and safety are protected; where they are motivated to reach their full potential; where they are given the opportunity for personal and career learning and advancement; where they are provided with the tools necessary to do their jobs well; and where employees are recognized and rewarded for their achievements without prejudice or discrimination.

#### **Business and Ethical Practices**

The Division is committed to ethical business conduct and program integrity. Division employees must represent the Division accurately and honestly and must not do anything that purposely defrauds anyone, including other companies or the government, of money, property or services. Record keeping and billing for services provided to clients must be accurate, timely and lawful.

## **PRINCIPLES**

### **(Part 2)**

#### **Confidentiality**

In keeping with various laws, regulations and professional ethical guidelines, Division employees must maintain the confidentiality of medical records and other client information. Furthermore, Division employees are required to keep information about other employees and the Division's proprietary business practices confidential.

#### **Conflicts of Interest**

Division employees are expected to act in a manner that is in the best interest of the Division and the clients served. Division employees may not use their position at the Division to profit personally or to assist others in profiting at the expense of the Division.

#### **Learning the Law**

Division employees shall perform their jobs with honesty, fairness and integrity. Division employees are also required to perform their jobs in accordance with applicable statutory and regulatory requirements. Division employees are expected to complete corporate compliance and ethics training courses, read regulatory updates, review policies/procedures, and ask questions to ensure they are performing their job functions properly and within the law.

#### **Duty to Report or Detect an Offense**

Division employees have a duty to report conduct that a person should reasonably know is unlawful, unethical or that violates the Code. Also, Directors and Managers have a duty to identify and report conduct that is unlawful, unethical or that violates the Code.

#### **Duty to Cooperate with Internal/External Investigations**

Division employees and contract workers must not attempt to impede, obstruct or influence any compliance investigation by the Division or any government or regulatory agency. Refusal to cooperate in the investigation of an alleged violation may lead to disciplinary action.

#### **The Cost of Breaking the Law**

Violating the law can greatly harm the Division's reputation and ability to deliver safe, reliable healthcare. Violations can result in large fines, penalties and even jail terms.

## EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

Division employees shall:

1. Recognize the boundaries of their particular competencies and the limitations of their expertise.
2. Provide only those services and use only those techniques for which they are qualified by education, training, or experience.
3. Maintain knowledge of relevant scientific and professional information related to the services rendered, and recognize the need for on-going education.
4. Represent accurately their competence, education, training, and experience including licenses and certifications.
5. Recognize the importance of continuing education and remain open to new counseling approaches and procedures.
6. Be culturally competent and recognize that cultural expectations and values change over time.
7. Be responsible for continuing education and remaining informed of current trends and changes in the field.
8. Create and maintain accurate and adequate clinical and financial records.
9. Be cognizant of cultural norms in relation to fee arrangements, bartering, and gifts. Employees shall explain to clients, early in the counseling relationship, all financial arrangements and obligations.
10. Recognize they have a moral, legal, and ethical responsibility to the community and to the general public.

## **EMPLOYEE GUIDELINES**

Many principles are based on common sense concepts of right and wrong, such as those against stealing, cheating and lying. These need no technical explanation. Others, however, are more technical and require explanation about how they may affect your duties.

### **Conflict of Interest**

All employees are expected to conduct business and personal activities in a manner that does not conflict with the interests of the Division. A “conflict of interest” is any situation where an employee has an outside interest or activity that may influence or appear to influence his/her ability to be objective or meet his/her responsibilities to the Division. Employees who deal with contractors, suppliers and competitors must not take advantage of their positions to obtain personal benefits.

### **Bribes, Kickbacks and Illegal Payments**

The Division makes business decisions based on sound judgment alone; therefore, any payment that constitutes a bribe, kickback or other illegal payment in any form is strictly prohibited. Therefore, no employee should ever offer, give, solicit or accept any benefits, incentives, gifts, discounts or rewards in return for business or confidential information.

### **Confidentiality**

The Division collects information about a client’s medical condition, use of medications and family history to provide appropriate care. We realize the sensitive nature of this information and are committed to maintaining its confidentiality. Confidential information is not to be shared with any person outside of the Division, unless that person is authorized by law to receive such information.

Client information should not be discussed, documented or shared where unauthorized people can access it, this includes social media, personal computers and through private email. At the time of employment, employees must sign a confidentiality statement acknowledging expectations and requirements related to confidential information.

### **Contract Bidding and Negotiation**

Contract bidding and negotiation should not be done by Division employees. The Division Director is expected to follow HCHD contract and procurement policies and shall work in collaboration with the HCHD’s administration.

### **Personal Fundraising**

Personal fundraising during business hours is prohibited. Personal fundraising is prohibited at all times to clients, stakeholders, and employees.

## **EMPLOYEE GUIDELINES**

### **Coding and Billing**

The Division's business practices and methods must comply with government regulations and ethical standards. The Division makes every effort to ensure that all claim submission activity accurately reflects the services rendered and complies with all government regulations and applicable third-party-payer contractual requirements.

### **False Claims**

No one may prepare or present claim information they know to be false or inaccurate. The Harford County Health Department's Director of Administration should be notified immediately in the event of suspected fraud, abuse, waste or other wrong doing. They will then determine if the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Corporate Compliance Officer shall be notified.

### **Professional Practice**

Employees required to be legally authorized (licensed, registered or certified) under the Health Occupations Article, Annotated Code of Maryland to render services, are responsible for obtaining his/her license or registration and renewals thereof on a timely basis. Employees shall only render services within the scope of his or her license or registration and in a manner that conforms to applicable standards of care and to the ethics of his or her profession. No employee is permitted to render services unless he or she possesses all valid, current and unrestricted state and federal licenses, registrations and certifications as necessary to legally practice and has been credentialed and privileged by the Division.

### **Personal Property**

The Division cannot be responsible for loss of personal property that is damaged or stolen. Employees are responsible for personal property/items/belongings brought to the workplace. The Division prohibits any items on the premises or worksite that are sexually suggestive, offensive, or demeaning to specific individuals or groups, along with firearms or weapons.

### **Witnessing of Legal Documents**

Division employees shall not act as a witness to legal documents such as Power of Attorney, guardianship, advance directives, and/or agency contracts without the expressed written approval of the Division Director. Division employees are authorized to countersign documents such as intake forms, authorizations (i.e., release of information form), treatment plans, etc. as directly related to their job duties.

## **EMPLOYEE GUIDELINES**

### **Drug Free Workplace**

To protect the interests of our employees and clients, the Division is committed to an alcohol and drug-free work environment. All employees must report for work free of the influence of alcohol and illegal drugs. Reporting to work under the influence of any illegal drugs or alcohol, having an illegal drug in your system, or using, possessing or selling illegal drugs will result in discipline action.

### **Managing Controlled Substances**

Division employees are expected to comply with all regulations governing the management and distribution of controlled substances. Specifically, no employee may illegally distribute any controlled substance, including prescription drugs. In addition, expired, adulterated or misbranded pharmaceutical drugs may not be distributed or diverted.

### **Marketing/Public Image**

All marketing materials and public information shall be processed in accordance with the Health Department's Social Media and Branding policies. Marketing materials should accurately represent the services offered by the organization and its level of licensure and accreditation. Inquiries by the news media about the Division shall be directed to the Division Director. Division employees are prohibited from using official stationery, corporation names, and/or position titles as endorsement for personal or non-job related purposes. Marketing activities will never knowingly mislead or misinform the public or misrepresent the Division. Marketing efforts will always respect the dignity and privacy rights of persons served.

### **Promoting a Positive Work Environment**

Division employees should promote a workplace in which they have the opportunity to feel respected, satisfied and appreciated. Division employees are hired, promoted and compensated according to their qualifications, performance and potential. Harassment or discrimination of any kind, especially involving race, color, religion, creed, gender, age, national origin, disability, veteran or marital status, or other classification protected by law is unacceptable in the workplace.

### **Referrals/Relationships**

The Division accepts referrals and admissions based solely on the client's clinical needs and our ability to render the needed services. We do not pay or offer to pay anyone for referral of patients. Violation of this policy may have severe consequences for the organization and the individuals involved, including civil and criminal penalties and possible exclusion from participation in federally funded health care programs.

## **STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT**

### **Standard 1. Ethics and Values**

Employees working with clients shall adhere to the ethics and values of their profession and shall use their Professional Code of Ethics as a guide to ensure ethical decision making.

### **Standard 2. Qualifications**

Employees shall be properly credentialed, in accordance to state and federal laws, and possess the knowledge fundamental to their professional practice.

### **Standard 3. Assessment**

Employees shall apply assessment strategies throughout treatment to ensure appropriate diagnoses, treatment interventions and treatment planning.

### **Standard 4. Intervention**

Employees shall utilize research-based best practices, which address the needs of the client, when developing and implementing treatment interventions.

### **Standard 5. Decision Making and Practice Evaluation**

Employees shall use data to guide service delivery and evaluate the efficiency and efficacy of their practice.

### **Standard 6. Record Keeping**

Employees shall ensure client records are maintained in accordance with professional ethics and local, state, and federal mandates.

### **Standard 7. Professional Development**

Employees shall continually enhance their clinical knowledge and skills in order to provide the most current, beneficial, and culturally appropriate services.

### **Standard 8. Cultural Competence**

Employees shall ensure that all clients and their families are provided with services that are within the context of cultural sensitivity, understanding and competence.

### **Standard 9. Interdisciplinary Leadership and Collaboration**

Employees shall provide leadership in developing positive treatment environments, supervision of other professionals, administrative direction, and treatment.

## SETTING BOUNDARIES

Division employees shall:

- Be clear with clients about the parameters of the counseling relationship.
- Be aware of their influential position with respect to their clients and avoid exploiting the trust and fostering dependency of the client.
- Make every effort to avoid dual/multiple relationships with clients that could impair professional judgment or increase the risk of harm.
- Not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with clients.
- Not counsel persons with whom they have had a previous sexual relationship.
- Not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with former clients.



## REFERENCES

- 1.1 Harford County Code 95-5 Chapter 95 Discriminatory Practices
- 1.2 Executive Order 01.01.2007.16 Code of Fair Employment Practices
- 1.3 Executive Order 01.01.2007.01 Standards of Conduct for Executive Branch Employees
- 1.4 HCHD Policy ADMIN # 07-01 Policy on Policies
- 1.5 HCHD Policy # Admin 07-03 Code of Conduct Policy
- 1.6 DHMH POLICY # 01.03.01 Policy on the DHMH Corporate Compliance Program
- 1.7 DHMH POLICY # 01.03.01 Policy on the DHMH Corporate Compliance Program & Addendum A-1,
- 1.8 The ethics outlined by the following Boards shall apply to the appropriately credentialed staff:
  - Board of Social Work;
  - Board of Professional Counselors;
  - Board of Physicians; and
  - Board of Psychologists.
- 1.9 State Ethics Commission Opinions:
  - Agency Funding 94-13
  - The Gift Law (dated: March 18, 2014)
  - Political Activity (January 24, 2013)
  - Procurements Provisions
- 1.10 Statement from the State Ethics Commission
- 1.11 HCHD Policy # PHE 00-01 Branding Policy
- 1.12 HCHD Policy # PHE 00-02 Social Media Policy