

Provision of Services via Electronic Means

Adopted by North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapy Licensure Board

August 30, 2012

In response to inquiries from licensees and other interested parties, the Board has confirmed that it has no separate view *per se* with regard to provision of services via electronic means. As long as a licensee is practicing in a manner consistent with his/her training and experience, and is receiving supervision as is appropriate, the medium for doing so is not at issue. However, it is incumbent upon any licensed marriage and family therapist (LMFT or LMFTA) to recognize that as he or she moves away from direct contact with clients, the therapist incrementally loses much of the richness of interaction which, as any therapist knows, comes with traditional face-to-face contact in an individual session with a client.

Delivery of clinical services by technology-assisted media such as telephone, use of video, and the internet obligate the therapist in the areas of structuring the relationship, informed consent, confidentiality, determining the basis for professional judgments, boundaries of competence, computer security, avoiding harm, dealing with fees and financial arrangements, and advertising. Specific challenges include, but are not limited to, verifying the identity of the client, determining if a client is a minor, explaining to clients the procedure for contacting the therapist when he or she is off-line, discussing the possibility of technology failure and alternative modes of communication if that failure occurs, exploring how to cope with potential misunderstandings when visual cues do not exist, identifying an appropriately trained professional who can provide local assistance (including crisis intervention) if needed, informing internet clients of encryption methods used to help ensure the security of communications, informing clients of the potential hazards of unsecured communication on the internet, telling internet clients whether session data are being preserved (and if so, in what manner and for how long), and determining and communicating procedures regarding the release of client information received through the internet with other electronic sources.

The Board considers that the practice of marriage and family therapy occurs both where the therapist who is providing therapeutic services is located and where the individual (patient/client) who is receiving the service is located. In order for an individual to provide marriage and family therapy services in North Carolina, that individual must be licensed by the North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapy Licensure Board or be exempt under the North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapy Licensure Act. On this basis, if a North Carolina licensee renders marriage and family therapy services electronically to an out-of-state client, it is recommended that the licensee contact the marriage and family therapy licensing board in the state in which the patient/client resides to determine whether or not such practice is permitted in that jurisdiction. Licensees are advised to review the North Carolina Licensure Act and the AAMFT Ethics Codes (adopted by the North Carolina Marriage and Family Therapy Licensure Board).