Establishing Professional Boundaries in Helping Professions

Presented by
Jeanice Hansen, MSW, LCSW

In collaboration with
Kathleen M. Garner, MA
Evelina A. Borruyo, PhD
Lynne Malkinson, MSW, LCSW
Carolina Gonzalez-Schienker MD, MPH

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MAPPING the BOUNDARIES

- What do professional boundaries mean to you? What comes up for you?
- What are some examples of bad professional boundaries that you’ve observed in work settings? (Think of one individually, then report as a table: best/strongest example.)
- What are some examples of good professional boundaries that you’ve observed in work settings?
- Do good fences make good neighbors?

PURPOSE of PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES in HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

- To protect and take care of yourself so that you can better serve others!
- Avoid burn-out
- To create a safe and respectful environment that is focused on the needs of patient
- Protect the patient!
Being a Navigator is different from a friend.

Navigators:
• represent society's support for the cancer patient
• is trained to give that support effectively.

A "Caring Relationship" is reciprocal (mutual) in terms of empathy. (Jean Watson)

The Navigator understands the emotions that the patient is feeling, which gains the patient's trust and generates a sense of commitment in the Navigator.

But, it is not mutual in FOCUS
• For the patient, the focus is self-directed
• For the Navigator, the focus is other-directed
And, it is not reciprocal in PERSPECTIVE

- for the Navigator, the perspective is external
- for the patient, the perspective is internal

This allows the Navigator to combine:
- their observation of emotions and sense of commitment
- with an objective view of the patient's situation.

"Learning that you have cancer is like having your plane land in Siberia when you really had planned on going to Paris."

Barb – Ovarian Cancer

What does cancer look/feel like to you?

Navigators need to recognize when shared emotions or experiences cause the FOCUS or PERSPECTIVE to switch.

They need a support system and constant learning to carry out their role effectively.
Why? What’s the big deal?

- Power Differential
  - Client is more vulnerable
  - Helper is in a position of influence
- Results in overly emotional involvement – draining!
- Interferes with completing other important tasks of navigation

BEHAVIORS that can lead to BLURRY BOUNDARIES

- Self Disclosure (TMI)
- Giving or receiving significant gifts
- Developing Friendships
- Physical contact

Transference

Refers to when a client unknowingly* directs feelings, attitudes or behaviors towards a helping professional (such as a Patient Navigator) that were originally associated with other important people or events.

For example, a client is resistant to the Patient Navigator’s suggestions because it reminds them of a controlling parent.

*unconscious, unaware
Transference becomes a Problem:
When a client ...
- Is demanding and overly dependent
- Is overly complementary: “You’re so wonderful!!”
- Is overly resistant and non-compliant
- Thinks you are irreplaceable: “You’re the only one who can help me!”
- Frequently calls for help
- Asks for assistance with unrelated tasks
- Is emotionally draining on helping professional

Counter Transference
Refers to when the helping professional (such as a Patient Navigator) unknowingly directs their feelings, attitudes or behaviors towards a client that were originally associated with other important people or events.
For example, a Patient Navigator becomes emotionally attached to a client because the client reminds them of a parent they lost.
*unconscious, unaware

Counter Transference becomes a Problem:
When the Helping Professional...
- Often thinks about the patient outside of work
- Feels deeply, emotionally impacted by the person
- Becomes overly-involved: Goes above and beyond the call of duty
- Makes patient their “personal mission”
- Becomes too attached to the outcome
- Overly identifies with client’s perspective or experience (e.g., culture).
- Overly favors one client over another
- Plays out their co-dependency needs (to be needed)
Burn-Out

Burnout is a **gradual** process by which a person detaches from work and other significant roles in response to prolonged stress.

A form of burnout is called "**compassion fatigue**," a deep physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion accompanied by acute emotional pain.

The ROAD to BURN-OUT:

So WHO is at RISK?

**Traits of a Burn-Out Prone Helper**

- Perfectionist
- Tend to set unrealistic standards for self
- Has difficulty letting go of work at the end of the day
- Take a great deal of pride in your work
- **Always** give 110%.

**COMMON SYMPTOMS of BURN-OUT**

- Irritation and dissatisfaction
- Increased negativity and pessimism
- Sleep and appetite disruption
- Preoccupation & difficulty concentrating
- Physical, emotional & mental exhaustion
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in work and life
- Depression may occur
- Personal and professional relationships begin to collapse
IMPACT of BURN-OUT on PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

- More likely to put your needs before the needs of your client
- Increased negativity & pessimism
- Sleep & appetite disruption
- Preoccupation & difficulty concentrating
- Physical, emotional & mental exhaustion
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness in work and life
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Healthy Practices for Professional Boundaries

- Set limits on the interaction
  - Establish expected roles and expectation
  - Remember that your involvement is temporary
- Encourage self-reliance/independence
- Avoid romantic/sexual relationships, business relationships and gift exchanges
- Use supervision to check yourself
- Address it as soon as you recognize it!!!

What to do when things get out of hand?

- Seek supervision
- Self-review: How did we get here? How can we work this out?
- Bring a third party (e.g., another navigator)
- Reduce shame and embarrassment... remember "this happens to everyone!"
- If necessary, transfer client to someone else
- Exploration Activities: Labyrinth, Journal
GOOD NEWS !!!
Not all roads lead to burn-out

EACH JOURNEY BEGINS WITH THE FIRST FEW STEPS

Establishing BOUNDARIES in HELPING RELATIONSHIPS

Step 1:
Define what are appropriate professional boundaries "within the context of your unique work environment."

Step 2:
Don't wait...establish your commitment to healthy personal and professional boundaries today!

Step 3:
Create a plan to maintain healthy personal and professional boundaries as you continue along the helping path.
CONSIDERATIONS for CREATING YOUR PLAN...

- Set realistic daily goals
- Take time to replenish (lunch & breaks)
- Manage your stress (hobbies, creative outlets, exercise, self-nurturance)
- Seek regular debriefing with supervisors/peers
- Leave work behind at the end of the day
- Reward yourself often for a job well done

Self-Care Plan for Professional Helpers

Creating your own plan...
Stress Free for Good:
10 Scientifically Proven Life Skills for Health and Happiness
Drs. F. Luskin and K. Pelletier, 2005.

Ten minutes to learn – One minute to practice – Ten seconds to work

**Life Skill #1:** Breathe from Your Belly
*Breathing slowly and deeply into and out of your belly is a signal to your mind and body to let go of stress and improve your health and happiness.*

Tips for practice:
- Practice every day
- 5 to 10 minutes at a time
- Practice when you’re not under stress
- Practice when you are under stress

**Life Skill #2:** Appreciate and acknowledge the good things in your life
*Helps you feel more peaceful and less stressed. And, it improves your relationships.*

Tips for practice:
- Take two slow, deep breaths then,
- Recite your gratitude list every day.
- Think of someone you love, a beautiful place and an act of kindness done for you.

**Life Skill #3:** Tense to Relax
*Experience the difference between muscle tension and relaxation. Learn to relax deeply and fully. Teach your body to become stress free.*

Tips for practice:
- Take two slow, deep belly breaths then, tighten and relax individual parts of your body from head to toe. Tense up that part for a few seconds, then exhale and relax fully.
- Enhance this practice with affirmations like, “I am relaxed and at peace.”

**Life Skill #4:** Visualize Success
*Your mind is a powerful tool to create a successful outcome to your problems. Your body reacts to whatever you picture in your mind – both to stress you out or heal you from stress.*

Tips for practice:
- Identify an unsuccessful part of your life.
- Take two slow, deep belly breaths then,
- Picture yourself succeeding at this activity.
- Notice what is different/better about what you usually do and put that into practice.

**Life Skill #5:** Slow Down!
*Put less strain on your body. Free up energy to accomplish what you really need to do. Allow time to appreciate what you have and all that life has to offer. The time you have is now!*

Tips for practice:
- Do a common activity slowly, carefully and with focused attention.
- Breathe slowly.
- Pay attention to how something smells, looks and feels.
- Be fully present in this moment.
**Life Skill #6: Appreciate Yourself**

*Notice the many good things you do. Learn to appreciate your talents and skills. Remind yourself that you work hard and are worthy of praise.*

**Tips for practice:**
- Appreciate your own worth and value.
- Think of one or two things you did that were helpful or that you did well.
- Acknowledge your talents and your willingness to help.
- Offering kindness, help and support are all positive choices that you make everyday.

**Life Skill #7: Smile Because You Care**

*Reflect on the positive reasons behind all the good that you do. You care about people and realize the value of your contributions here.*

**Tips for practice:**
- Think about what you did today and why you did these things.
- Smile, when you remember that you did them because you care about people and your work.
- Let your experience of love and care warm your heart and smile. It promotes a healing state of well-being and peace.

**Life Skill #8: Stop Doing What Doesn’t Work**

*Learn to recognize when what you’re doing is not successful and stop. Try new strategies that may have better results.*

**Tips for practice:**
- When you’re faced with a difficult challenge, take some deep breaths and focus on an image of someone you love until you feel calm.
- Observe yourself in the problem and imagine a new solution or way to handle it.

**Life Skill #9: Just Say “No”**

*Remember, you have choices. You don’t have to force a “yes” and do something you don’t want to do. You are responsible for the choices you make. Make them wisely.*

**Tips for practice:**
- When asked to do something you know you don’t want to do, take a few deep breaths and say, “I need a few moments to think about this. Can I get back to you in a little while?”
- Choose a response that reflects your true choice.

**Life Skill #10: Accept What You Cannot Change**

*Life can be hard at times, and sometimes, there’s nothing we can do to alter the way things turn out. Acceptance gives us the power to make peace with what we cannot change and relieves our suffering.*

**Tips for practice:**
- Learn to choose battles you have a chance of winning. To solve problems, you need serenity and wisdom, not anger and despair.
- Learn to practice peacefulness whenever you can. Take 2 slow, deep breaths and think of something beautiful in your life. If you can’t change it, what can you do to make peace with it?
- Learn to accept things you cannot change. Your mind and body suffer when you get angry.

"Peace of mind costs you nothing and is independent of any product of the moment ....the solution to your problems lies inside of you."