

Psychodynamic Practice

Individuals, groups and organisations formerly *Psychodynamic Counselling*

Notes and guidance on Confidentiality

Recommendations concerning the publication and presentation of clinical material

This issue is a complex and important one. *Psychodynamic Practice* is committed to promoting the use of clinical/qualitative research material and considers such inclusion a vital part of disseminating knowledge. In doing so, we are also committed to encouraging authors to think carefully about their way(s) of responding to the issue of confidentiality with respect to publishing material. Authors are asked to refer to the ethical guidelines on research and publication issued by the professional body(ies) to which they belong. In addition, we recommend the following.

Authors should be aware of the different ways that client/patient confidentiality may be protected. These are:

1. gaining client/patient consent
2. heavily disguising material
3. using composites
4. using a process approach
5. using colleague as author

Client/Patient Consent

This method is often the one preferred by professional bodies. It is, however, a very complex matter. Most patients, if asked, might well give consent, yet this does not mean that it is ethical to accept it or indeed ask for it. Responsibility for protecting client/patient confidentiality must therefore include considering the significance, within the relationship, of requesting consent

Heavily disguising material

This is a very common method. Some material, even though very brief, however, cannot be disguised without corrupting significant aspects of it and consequently losing either its verity or its usefulness or both.

Composites

This method is difficult to use in a sustained way (a case study for example). It is particularly useful, however, when wishing to illustrate a particular theme/point, since certain behaviours may be similar in a number of patients and thus characteristics of several different client/patients can be drawn together to make a composite picture.

Process Approach

This method is particularly useful for demonstrating a point of technique. By selecting material carefully, details of exchange, including the therapist's thoughts, can offer the reader a detailed insight into the therapeutic interactions without revealing details of the external life of the client/patient which might allow for identification. Material can be presented in the form of a script.

It has limited use in terms of exploring particular symptoms since it provides no detailed information about the relational context of the patient/client. For further details of this approach, see Klumpner & Frank (1991):

Colleague as Author

This is a method not often used. However, it may allow the dissemination of knowledge whilst protecting confidentiality. (It occurs more often by way of a supervisor using the clinical material of a supervisee). It may also be a useful exercise in the process of disentangling countertransference material.

Important note

We would emphasise that none of the above methods are mutually exclusive and are often best used in some type of combination. If in doubt about which method(s) to employ, we advise you to discuss this with your supervisor/mentor. You are also welcome to contact one of the editors for further clarification.

The use of brief vignettes may not require any of the above methods, as long as they contain no identifiable material.

Please also note, we have focused here on the ethical issue of confidentiality in the context of publishing clinical/qualitative research material. For ethical considerations with regard to the activity of research, whether qualitative or quantitative, authors are advised to refer to the guidelines published by the professional body to which they belong. e.g. UKCP Ethical Guidelines for Monitoring, Evaluating & Research in Psychotherapy.

Lastly, we would like to acknowledge our debt to Glen Gabbard whose paper, 'Disguise or consent: problems and recommendations concerning the publication and presentation of clinical material' in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* [(2000) 81:1071-1086] the editors have found extremely useful. We recommend it to all potential authors.

References

Gabbard, G. O. (2000) 'Disguise or consent: problems and recommendations concerning the publication and presentation of clinical material', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 81: 1071-1086.

Klumpner, G. H. & Frank, A. (1991) 'On methods of reporting clinical material', in *The Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 39: 537-551.