Professional Counselors & Public Policy

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What would you like to learn during our time together?
who am I?

• Clinical background
• Teaching
• Research
• Supervision
Agenda

- Ethical responsibilities
- Current social injustices
- Methods re: legislations
Ethical Responsibility

ACA Code of Ethics professional core values states professional counselors promote social justice

- Code A.7.a states that when appropriate, counselors will seek to eliminate barriers at the individual, group, institutional, and societal levels.

✗ Professional counselors have an ethical responsibility to advocate on many levels for clients as well as the counseling profession.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MCSJ Competencies</th>
<th>ACA Advocacy Competencies:</th>
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<tr>
<td>reflects the local, state, and federal laws and policies that regulate or influence client human growth and development</td>
<td>influencing public awareness, legislation and policy in a large, public arena on behalf of client groups or communities</td>
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Ratts, et al., 2015, Need advo citation
Relationship between social injustice and the mental health of groups

The 2001 U.S. Surgeon General’s report highlighted the relationship between mental health and discrimination, oppression and poverty

operating from a social justice perspective and taking a political stance on social issues has been a part of our profession since its inception.
Issues of social justice are integral to counseling our clients do not exist as individuals.

Acknowledging the fact that oppression exists & negatively contributes to the mental health of our clientele - we need to balance both individual counseling and advocacy in our work with clients.
Current Social Injustices
What skills do we have that relate to advocacy?

✗ What population do you feel most passionate about?
✗ What do you perceive to be a “social problem” in your community?
✗ What types of inequality do you see frequently?
✗ What systemic inequalities/issues do you notice your clients encounter most frequently?

Pope, Gonzalez, Cameron, & Pangelinan, 2019
Wellbeing & Wellness

- Established link between oppression & mental health
  - Food insecurity
  - Sexual minority stress
  - Racial bias in job seeking
  - Poverty and career development

(Diemer & Ali, 2009; Fickling, 2016; Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018; Martinez, Frongillo, Leung, & Ritchie, 2018)
Methods Re: Legislation
Figure 1. ACA Advocacy Competencies
Macro- Public Arena

- Distribute the public
- Educate the public
  environmental factors
- Act as change agents
Macro-Public Arena

- Disseminating information
  - Media Communication
- Public Demonstrations
- Lobbying

- Supporting Existing Alliances or Creating New Ones
- Lobbying Legislators
What are examples of advocacy we have seen?

- Disseminating information
  - Twitter, Facebook, Instagram
- Public Demonstrations
  - Protests

Macro-Public Arena

- Supporting Existing Alliances or Creating New Ones
- BLM

- Lobbying Legislators
  - Anti bias training
  - Mental health training
Steps to PP Advocacy

Understand
- Understand the legislative process

Understand
- Understand differences between state and federal levels of action

Recognize
- Recognize relevant issues

Know
- Know your legislators- they have access to make change

Identify
- Identify relevant bills in your state
How a Bill Becomes a Law

Committee Action:
- House:
  - Referred to House Committee
  - Referred to subcommittee
  - Reported by full committee
  - Rules committee action
- Senate:
  - Referred to Senate Committee
  - Referred to subcommittee
  - Reported by full committee

Floor Action:
- House: House debate, vote on passage
- Senate: Senate debate, vote on passage

Conference Action:
- Once both chambers have passed related bills, conference committee of members from both houses is formed to work out differences.
- Compromise version from conference is sent to each chamber for final approval.

House of Representatives

Senate

President

Compromise version approved by both houses is sent to president, who can either sign it into law or veto it and return it to Congress. Congress may override a veto by two-thirds majority vote in both houses; bill then becomes law without president's signature.
What issues are important to you?
Step 3/4: Know your legislators— they have access to make change & Identify relevant bills in your state

- ACA provides access through VoterVoice at:
  - https://www.counseling.org/government-affairs/actioncenter

- You can also typically find search links through your individual state organizations
  - State: LegiScan
  - Federal: https://congress.gov/
How?

✗ Email/Letter
✗ Phone
✗ In Person
Email/Letter Advocacy

✗ Add your personal message
✗ In the email, outline
  ✓ the issue
  ✓ why it is important to counselors
  ✓ personal story (for example, “As a veteran, I know you see the need…”)
  ✓ some data
  ✓ a clear request about what you want the Legislator to do
Phone/In Person - Before the meeting...

- One-page summary of the issue, your position, and what you are asking for
- “Please support/cosponsor (or oppose) Bill Number ___,” or “Please help us to ____.” An “I wanted to get to know you and tell you about our organization”
- Refer to specific bill by its official title and number
- Identify ways what you are asking for helps the legislator’s district or state.
  - i.e. Job creation or retention, saving government funding
Phone/In - During the meeting...

✗ Practice talking points at home you will only have a few minutes to meet with your rep and make an impression
✗ Review the information you developed before the meeting
✗ Remember that your representative may have no idea what a counselor is
✗ Speak slowly and clearly, make good eye contact
After the Meeting..

- Remember to thank representative for their time and invite them to consider your point and follow up with them
- A strong handshake
- Follow up with thank you note, invite further discussion and meetings
- Continue contact with your representatives throughout the year
Now what are you going to do?

✗ Goal (What do I want to see improved/changed?)
✗ Who will my goal impact? (What specific population are you aiming to impact?)
✗ How will I know I met my goal? (How will I evaluate the effectiveness of my advocacy plan?)
✗ Is my advocacy action on behalf of a person or group, or is it with a person or group?
✗ Time frame (How long will it take to reach my goal?)

Pope, Gonzalez, Cameron, & Pangelinan, 2019
References


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