

## **Practice Advisory #9**

### **Signing of Reports and Other Materials Prepared by Registrants**

#### ***DRAFT FOR REGISTRANT FEEDBACK***

#### **Practice Issue**

The integrity and authenticity of reports, communications, or other documents created by registrants is an important part of protecting the public's interest in receiving qualified and accountable psychological services. This advisory deals with the issue of "signing" a document which is in electronic form.

#### **Rationale**

With the advent of electronic duplication, transmission, and filing of documents, a report or other document prepared by a registrant may be filed electronically by being sent to a receiving party by electronic mail ("email"), prepared on a template form (as required by some insurance companies, for example) and then faxed to a recipient so that it is directly input to the recipient's electronic records, scanned and sent as an attachment to an email, or in some other fashion submitted electronically.

Registrants should understand that any document created for electronic transmission (e.g., via email) carries as much weight and importance as a paper document. One way of helping to ensure an electronic document's integrity and authenticity is for the registrant to affix an electronic signature or to employ some other electronic method of identification and authentication.

#### **Relevant Standards in the Code of Conduct**

##### **7.19 Signing Documents**

All reports, letters or other documents containing information, opinions or assessments prepared by a registrant in the course of that registrant's professional services must be signed by the registrant before they are provided to another party.

##### **7.20 Electronic Documents**

For the purposes of electronically created, transmitted or filed documents, "signing" a document includes affixing an electronic signature or providing some other electronic method of identification and authentication when the document is sent.

#### **Advisory**

- Reports or other documents that are filed via email or in some other fashion directly between computers may have an electronically scanned and reproduced signature affixed in place of an original signature.
- Reports or other documents that are prepared on a template provided by the receiving party and which do not provide a formal space for a signature should still be signed by the registrant if a paper copy of that document is produced in the submission process (e.g., for the purposes of faxing to the recipient).
- Electronically created and stored progress notes may be initialled within the electronic document. If printed in paper form for production to another person, all pages should be affixed with original initials or an original signature, and/or accompanied by an appropriate attestation form, as confirmation that the notes are accurate copies of the electronically stored information.

- All professional communications sent via email or other electronic means, whether bearing an electronically scanned and reproduced signature or not, should contain all appropriate identifying information that a printed copy contains (e.g., full name, degree and registration status, and contact information). A registrant's professional obligations are not lessened with respect to reports, documents, or communications which lack a signature but are filed electronically. Registrants should always be aware that email correspondence is still professional correspondence. Accordingly, when communicating via email, registrants should maintain a standard of professionalism and avoid using colloquial, inflammatory or otherwise unprofessional language.
- Any electronic report, document, or other communication with or pertaining to a client should be considered part of that client's file. Accordingly, registrants should ensure that they are able to produce these materials when responding to a proper request for information, regardless of the format in which the information is stored.