Introduction

Music therapy associations on a global basis increasingly require that members act according to a Code of Ethics to remain in good standing with that Association.

Professional ethics comprise principles of behavior required by a professional organization’s members. They are informed by values determining what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and moral duty.

An example of a member’s Music Therapy Code of Ethics is that authored by the American Music Therapy Association available at http://www.musictherapy.org/ethics.html

Music therapists need to also be aware of and comply with a Code of Ethics in their workplaces, as well as adhere to governmental laws in which ethical behavior is expected, whether implicitly or explicitly stated.

What is a Code of Ethics in Music Therapy?
The principles of conduct governing a group of registered or board certified music therapist members.

These may comprise, but are not limited to, principles in therapy provision, therapeutic relationships with clients, research, publication, public presentation of clinical material, training, financial and advertising issues, and responsibilities to colleagues.

What is the WFMT’s position on Codes of Ethics?
The WFMT encourages all professional Music Therapy Associations to develop, maintain, and periodically refine a Code of Ethics. Given the wide variation of Music Therapy Association developments across countries, geographic regions, and cultures, the WFMT expects that each Association’s Code of Ethics will vary. WFMT Guidelines for Music Therapy Associations developing Codes are Ethics are at http://www.wfmt.info/WFMT/Guidelines_for_CReating_a_Code_of_Ethics.html

WFMT expects, however, that all international music therapists work according to fundamental principles, as follows.

Approved by the WFMT council on September 18, 2010
WFMT Expectations of Fundamental Principles for Ethical Music Therapy Practice and Research

Do

- Music therapists are bound to act according to the Code of Ethics of their Professional Association.
- Music therapists have a duty of care to conduct appropriate clinical and educational services, as well as to conduct research informed by the evolving relevant professional knowledge bases.
- Music therapists provide treatment in accordance with their training and competence levels.
- Music therapists always respect the clients’ rights and dignity and acts in the clients’ best interests.
- Client confidentiality should be maintained. When identifiable client material is to be presented outside of the client’s treatment team, clients or their guardians need to provide informed consent, preferably signed on a Consent Form (see WFMT Prototype Informed Consent Form). Clients must be informed about the scope of their consent (see WFMT document on Reporting on Music Therapy Clients on the Internet and Privacy Issues: http://www.wfmt.info/WFMT/Internet_and_Privacy_Issues.html).
- All music therapy research participants, or their guardians, must provide informed consent. This means that they know the aims and purpose of the research, and they receive a document which they can keep outlining the aims and the Researcher’s contact details for further inquiries.
- Ethics Committees (when available) or appropriate managers, within Organizations where music therapy research participants are recruited, must approve music therapy research.
- Integrate established ethical guidelines for conducting research with specific populations. For example, when planning research with Indigenous peoples of Australia (see http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethics.html).
- Clients’ therapeutic products (e.g., song compositions) belong to the clients until their death, and upon their death, their “next of kin” or a designated beneficiary. An exception to this is research products related to clinical research. As formal consent has been given to the researcher, the product belongs to the researcher. If a completed or incomplete therapeutic product is only in the therapist’s possession when the patient dies or the patient is unable to state his or her wish for its future usage, the therapist may or may not decide to give the product to the client’s next of kin after the therapist considers what s/he believes that the client would want done with the product, and its potential effect on the recipient.

Do Not

- Music therapists should not discriminate against clients, nor exploit clients for personal gain; they must not personally profit from the commercialization of client’s clinical materials.
- Music therapists should not personally undermine a professional colleague. (This is distinguished from robust, professionally informed feedback of each other’s work to advance professional thinking, knowledge, and skills.)
- Music therapists must not record clients engaged in music therapy (whether audio recordings, audio/visual recordings, or photographs) or record another professionals’ services/presentations, unless consent to record has been granted by the parties involved, including clients (or their guardians), or by other professionals (see WFMT paper on Reporting on music therapy clients on the internet and privacy issues at http://www.wfmt.info/WFMT/Internet_and_Privacy_Issues.html).

Future Considerations

A music therapy Code of Ethics is intended to respect and protect the autonomy of clients and music therapy students from malpractice, whether perceived or actual. A Code of Ethics is also intended to increase accountability and credibility of an organisation’s members and their knowledge contributions in relation to clients’ served, and to the public-at-large. A Code of Ethics is to be regarded as a “living document”, intended to evolve over time as knowledge advances. Accordingly, music therapy organizations should regularly review and refine their Code of Ethics statements.

Further Reading