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## August 2021 Newsletter

### In this Newsletter

1. New Workshop Date Announced- "Are You Ready for an Audit: Diagnosing, Documenting, Billing and Coding in Private Practice
2. Ethics Matters – Financial aspects of private practice and informed consent
3. Send your ethics and practice related questions to [LsTsukroff@aol.com](mailto:LsTsukroff@aol.com) for the September Newsletter

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It's hard to believe that August is already here and September is just around the corner. My two weeks in Italy (picture above) has left me refreshed and still longing for concrete information and clarity around the long-term status of tele-health coverage, clients' willingness to return to in-person sessions, the likeliness of needing my physical office space and the future of psychotherapy. I guess, time will tell. Which is what I have been saying to myself since March 2020 and at this, point, I've gotten pretty good at managing uncertainty, going with the flow and pivoting when needed. For those who know me, this has been no small feat!

### **What Has Transpired Since My Last Newsletter?**

Some movement towards tele-health payment parity in some states, see Illinois <https://www.naswil.org/post/nasw-il-advocacy-at-work-governor-signs-hb3308-making-permanent-many-2020-telehealth-provisions>

And

New Jersey [https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2020/Bills/S3000/2559\\_R4.PDF](https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2020/Bills/S3000/2559_R4.PDF)

We are waiting for Governor Murphy to sign The post-COVID-19 telehealth expansion bill ([S-2559](#)) into law. He has until mid-August to do so, but if he doesn't do anything, the bill will automatically become a law. If you haven't done so already, consider contacting Governor Murphy and urge him to put pen to paper to secure the benefits afforded by this very important bill

<https://naswnj.socialworkers.org/Advocacy/Advocacy-Alerts>

Several interesting seminars/informational handouts from Person Centered Tech on interstate practice, securing communications and reviews of popular technology platforms

<https://personcenteredtech.com/>

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NASW revises the Code of Ethics and adds new verbiage around self-care and Cultural Competence

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

### **New Workshop Date Announced**

"Are You Ready for an Audit: Diagnosing, Documenting, Billing and Coding in Private Practice

When: Saturday, September 25, 2021

Time: 9:00 AM-3:00 PM EST (1 hour lunch on your own and two 15-minute breaks)

Where: Zoom

Format: Live, interactive video

CEUs: 5 Ethics

***Are You Ready for An Audit? Diagnosing, Documenting, Billing and Coding in Private Practice, Course #3491 is approved by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program to be offered by Leslie S. Tsukroff, MSW, LCSW as an individual course. Individual courses, not providers, are approved at the course level. State and provincial regulatory boards have the final authority to determine whether an individual course may be accepted for continuing education credit. ACE course approval period: from 02/12/21 to 02/12/2023. Social workers completing this course receive 5 ethics continuing education credits.***

Since the introduction of managed mental health care, some social workers feel compelled and somewhat justified to engage in "creative" diagnosing, documenting, billing and coding practices. Here and there they tweak a CPT code to obtain reimbursement for sessions, minimize or exaggerate symptoms to fit the client into the more desired diagnosis code, omit key clinical information in the case record to protect a client's reputation or

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privacy and/or randomly adjust fees in order to work with certain clients. In this workshop, Leslie S. Tsukroff, MSW, LCSW will explore these common and often overlooked unethical and illegal practices, using the NASW Code of Ethics as the primary guide and with specific reference to the important social work values of Service, Integrity and Social Justice. Participants will leave this workshop being able to:

1. Identify fraudulent practices around billing, coding diagnosing and related clinical/billing documentation
2. Outline key elements of avoiding fraudulent billing, diagnosing and related clinical/billing documentation
3. Develop and implement practice policies and procedures around approaching ethical dilemmas involving clients' needs, desire for and access to clinical services

To learn more and to register, click here

<https://www.leslietsukroff.com/are-you-ready-for-an-audit-wsnew-p>

### **Ethics Matters** **(formerly Ethics Question of the Month)**

Did you know that best practice indicates that as mental health practitioners, we have an obligation to inform our clients about the costs of treatment and educate them about using their insurance benefits and related reimbursement issues? NASW's Code of Ethics advises social workers that informed consent standards around clients' financial obligations must be met.

"Social workers should use clear and understandable language to inform clients of ... the limits to services because of the requirements of a third-party payer, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives,...."  
(NASW, COE, **1.03 Informed Consent**)

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I often hear the following from private practitioners: "I don't take insurance", "It's not my responsibility," or "I'm private pay only". So how does the OON or private pay clinician adhere to this standard? The practitioner's fee policy/agreement should address issues including but not limited to: who is responsible for verifying insurance coverage; fees for services provided; the insurance company's obligation to the client; services often not reimbursed by insurance companies. It is strongly advised that clinician's refrain from stating "most insurance plans reimburse for some or all mental health services". This statement is misleading to prospective clients, as not all insurance plans provide coverage for marriage/couples counseling and prior to the pandemic, phone sessions were not reimbursable and video-conferencing was not routinely covered.

In fact, The NASW Standards for Clinical Social Work in Social Work Practice states that all social workers, including private practitioners, are mandated to develop and implement written office policies, procedures and client agreements concerning fees and payment.

"... clinical SWers in private ...practice shall develop & implement written policies that describe their office procedures, such as".....  
**fee agreements; procedures for payment; cancellation policy**  
"These policies shall be made available to & reviewed with each client at the beginning of treatment." (pg. 17)

If you are a social worker in New Jersey, you have additional obligations outlined in the New Jersey Social Work Licensing Regulations. Some of the information that should be included in New Jersey social workers' financial agreements are: the person who is responsible for payment; the fees associated with all services provided; if asked, how fees are determined.

Want to know more? Consider joining me for my next workshop on Saturday, September 25, 2021, "Are You Ready for an Audit: Diagnosing,

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Documenting, Billing and Coding in Private Practice.” where I will cover issues around informed consent standards, common mistakes regarding diagnosis, billing, record-keeping, coding and fees. Click here to learn more and to register @ <https://www.leslietsukroff.com/are-you-ready-for-an-audit-wsnew-p>

### **Coming in the September Newsletter**

**Ethics Matters.** Your ethics and practice related questions. Each month, I will feature answers to your burning questions. Please, be careful to provide general questions so as to protect the confidentiality of all involved. Submit questions to [LsTsukroff@aol.com](mailto:LsTsukroff@aol.com)

As always, thank you for reading. Wishing you and the ones you love a happy, healthy and safe end of summer and start of the school year-

Leslie

*This document is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to be used as advice (legal, ethical or technical) or as a substitute for the guidance of an attorney or an individualized consultation. It does not address all possible clinical, legal and ethical issues that may arise, nor does it take into consideration the particular circumstances, nuances or concerns of the situation or person(s) involved. Leslie S. Tsukroff, Inc. does not assume any responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions in its content. © Leslie S. Tsukroff, Inc. 2023 (All Rights Reserved)*