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March 2023 Newsletter

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Greetings Colleagues and Friends-

Happy Social Work Month to all, no matter what your degree, discipline or license. I celebrate you!

It's been a while since my last Newsletter. I hope that your 2023 has been going well and you are looking forward to spring. I know I am. In addition to catching my breath after a hectic start of the year, I've been busy revamping (and renaming some) of my workshops and developing new ones. I'm awaiting to receive CE approval for a workshop on minor's rights specifically designed for New Jersey clinicians and plan to announce a summer date for this 3 credit (ethics) course soon.

Who's going to the NASW-NJ conference? While I will not be presenting or attending any workshops, I will be there as an exhibitor. Make sure you stop by my table in the Exhibit Hall to say "hi" and for a chance to win prizes, including FREE and discount attendance to future workshops (including the ones listed in this Newsletter).

Earlier this month I, along with several social work trailblazers were featured in Focus, NASW-NJ's newsmagazine. Click [here](https://issuu.com/naswnj/docs/focus_march_20232final_2_/30)

https://issuu.com/naswnj/docs/focus_march_20232final_2_/30 to read about your amazing social work colleagues.



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Spring Workshop Dates Announced

Many of you in central and western states have requested a later start time for workshops, so for the next two, we will be starting at 11:00 AM EST.

May 2023

Warning: Boundary Crossing Ahead

Saturday, May 20, 2023

11:00 AM -4:30 PM EST

Live, synchronous on Zoom

5 ethics CEs available to Social Workers in all states except for NY and WV.

Past attendees rave about the thought-provoking case examples that illuminate the intricacies of the therapeutic relationship and potential pitfalls that can (and do) arise when clinicians engage in dual relationships and boundary crossings.

This is not your ordinary, boring and typical ethics workshop.

Attendees will have ample opportunity to examine common situations that require careful ethical and legal considerations such as:

- Attending a client's wedding, funeral or graduation
Accepting referrals from one's own church, synagogue, mosque, or temple
- Dating one's co-worker, mentor, supervisor or boss
- Adjusting a client's diagnosis, waiving no show fees for some, but not all clients, and ignoring a client's repeated lateness/cancellations
- Treating more than one member of a family concurrently and/or consecutively
- ...And so many more

Due to the interactive nature of this workshop, registration is



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limited.

June 2023

Perpetrating Fraud? Accurate Diagnosis, Documentation, Billing and Coding in Private Practice (Formerly, Are You Ready for an Audit: Diagnosing, Documenting, Billing and Coding In PP)

Sunday, June 11, 2023

11:00 AM -4:30 PM EST

Live, synchronous on Zoom

5 ethics CEs available to Social Workers in all states except for NY and WV.

Clinicians who fail to fully understand the laws, requirements and best practice standards around setting fees, documenting and billing for services, applying standardized place of service, modifier and CPT codes, and formulating accurate diagnoses leave themselves and their practice open to serious risk. Whether practitioners knowingly and deliberately violate the law in order to circumvent reimbursement requirements or act on misinformation obtained from well-meaning, but ill-informed colleagues, supervisors or Facebook, fraudulent practices can leave practitioners vulnerable to insurance company clawbacks, allegations of unethical conduct and licensing board complaints. Centered around the core value of Integrity, the presenter will address the ethical, legal and financial implications of:

- improperly recording the services provided and fees charged and paid in the medical record
- unfair and inequitable fee setting
- engaging in common fraudulent billing and collection practices.



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What COVID Reminded Me About Being an Entrepreneur

Perhaps like many of you, I've fully embraced my hybrid practice. Though, at 80% virtual and 20% in-person, I'm not sure if my practice really counts as hybrid. But let's go with it.

On March 16th I commemorated the 3-year anniversary of my first pandemic virtual appointment. Believe it or not, I really struggle to recall what my day-to-day life looked like before that momentous event. Based on 21 years of muscle memory, I know that I went to the office 4-5 days per week and sat across from my clients as they shared their pain and joy and granted me the privilege of walking with them on their respective journeys. I thought nothing of it; it's what I did. I got up, showered, dressed, ate breakfast, gathered my lunch/dinner and trekked to the office. While there, I engaged in all activities related to owning and managing a private practice. I prepared for my day, met with clients, drafted notes (Ugh!), conducted outreach, submitted and processed claims and socialized with officemates. Occasionally I would join a friend or colleague for coffee, lunch or dinner, run errands between clients (if I had a long enough break) or if feeling particularly stressed or unmotivated, I'd call a friend, lie down on the couch for a bit or read for pleasure (Gasp).

When I was sick, I set an away message on my e-mail, text and voice mail, took the day off and did not respond to anything related to work. I truly rested. I trusted the world, my clients and my business would not fall apart if I took a day off because I was SICK.

I took all holidays off, including those frequent Monday school holidays (parents, you know what I am talking about) and either the week leading up to Thanksgiving or the week between Christmas and New Years. I did not work when my child had off from school for spring break and I took at least 1 week off in the summer. I reserved 2 Fridays a month for dealing with the



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administrative aspects of my practice, while giving myself permission to spend the other Fridays doing anything BUT work-related activities. And in the summer, I took advantage of the slow-down and condensed my caseload into a 3-day week.

I know in the depths of my being that this is what my days and weeks looked like, despite not having any clear memories of them. I also know that all of this was "normal" and it worked. But somewhere between the world shutting down and acclimating to living with an endemic, I "forgot" the importance of consistency, structure, boundaries, self-imposed limit-setting and engaging in activities that fulfill, relax and energize me.

And this "temporary amnesia" didn't just happen to me. Most colleagues describe similar phenomena; many struggled (and still struggle) with organizing their virtual or hybrid practices and creating an acceptable work-life balance. Over the past 6 months, the majority of clinicians seeking consultation services are looking to work on time-management and boundary setting. They are burnt out, behind in notes and record-keeping, and are just plain stressed. And who wouldn't be; they are working around the clock. They: aren't taking enough time off; are scheduling so many clients in one day they skip meals, don't have time to write notes, use the restroom or to do anything else; are flexing their work hours to accommodate client requests (early mornings, late evenings and weekends); working while on vacation; signing onto virtual appointments despite being symptomatic with the flu, COVID, colds, and migraines; and not taking the time to heal after personal tragedies and losses.

Don't get me wrong, I didn't start out in private practice having all of the answers. When I first launched, I made so many mistakes. I worked ALL of the time, said "yes" way too many times, and over-extended myself all because I was afraid.



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- afraid the phone would stop ringing (it was 1999 and on-line referrals were not a thing yet)
- afraid I wouldn't be able to make enough money
- afraid to admit that I wasn't the right fit for every client who called and every client who called wasn't the right fit for me
- afraid to stop and think: "What do I want? What do I need?"

It took me YEARS of stress, frustration, tears and countless declarations of, "I quit, I'm opening up a bakery" before I realized that I was in control; I had autonomy; I was my own BOSS. I could design my practice any way I wanted; I could create the mold and my practice could fit MY needs. Wasn't that the reason I transitioned from working for others to becoming an entrepreneur and starting my own business?

And then during the pandemic, it was as if I had learned nothing and I fell into the same trap that so many others find themselves in today. The pandemic really messed with the system I had in place, and it took me a while to tell myself what I often say to consultees: "when you own a business, you should run the business, the business shouldn't run you." So much for taking one's own advice! During the initial weeks and months of the pandemic it didn't dawn on me pivoting to in-home employment would require a complete reset. I had never planned on telehealth as a long-term, viable option. Making this switch meant I needed to scrap and revise most of my business plan. It was clear from those early months that if I was going to work from home a good percentage of the time, more structure and more limit setting (with myself and others) was imperative. Though it took me a while to wrap my head around this, I've restructured my whole business.

While I still sometimes find myself saying "yes" a little bit too often, I have (finally) found a recipe that works for me. In fact, with much trepidation,



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support and determination, I have expanded my scope, and am able to regularly engage in activities that bring me joy, keep me grounded and foster connection. These invaluable "re-sets" enable me to continue to give my best to my clients, family, friends and community.

If you are struggling with creating the practice you want and deserve and could benefit from help in making that a reality, I'm here for you. For those thinking about launching in the near future and want to implement measures to prevent burn out, don't hesitate to reach out.

Professionally-Led Consultation Groups

Whether you have newly launched your practice or have been a practice owner for a long time, support and guidance from a knowledgeable mentor is invaluable.

For those who have recently started on their private practice journeys, I am in the process of organizing two separate consultation groups to meet your needs. While both groups will focus on clinicians who have started in private practice recently and are looking for support and guidance in clinical interventions, documentation and record-keeping, growing and managing a private practice, ethical and legal considerations, they differ in clinician population.

Up and Comers --This group is appropriate for clinicians who are starting their careers, have recently obtained independent licensure and are new to private practice

Seasoned--This group is geared towards mental health professionals who have been in the field for some time, but are new to the world of private practice.



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**For those who have been in private practice for many years
Veterans--** This group is best suited for those who have well-established practices and are looking for clinical, ethics and practice-related support.
Want to know more? Let's chat LTsukroffLCSW@Hushmail.com or 973-879-1678

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