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## Responsible Self-Stewardship for Counselor and Counselee Well-Being

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## **Responsible Self-Stewardship for Counselor and Counselee Well-Being**

In the last 27 years of practice I have repeatedly heard from counselees that their previous treatment was ineffective and did not include essential components necessary for competent practice (i.e., bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment, case conceptualization and written evaluation, multi-axis DSM diagnosis, treatment plans, research based interventions, and outcome measurements). This, of course, is a tragedy because experience and research both indicate that good psychotherapy works (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubbard, 2009), having outcomes equal to those found in the practice of medicine (Carr, 2009). “Good therapy,” however, is contingent on the skill and health of the clinician (Sperry, 2011).

In addition to excellent training, one means of insuring quality care involves wise and responsible “self- stewardship,” a term that I, like Canning (2011), prefer to “self-care.” This column presents topics related to counselor efficacy and, in particular, how counselors can remain vital and effective in the field via effective self-stewarding practices. Each issue will include an introduction to a topic, a case study, and implications for practice. This edition covers the use of process notes to help counselors recognize and responsibly manage personal reactions that could potentially interfere with successful treatment.

### **Case Study**

Stephen awoke with a start only to find himself drenched in sweat. It was that same nightmare... the burning building, encroaching darkness, desperately looking for something; or was it someone? He turned on the light and focused on his wife’s gentle and rhythmic breathing. Reaching his hand out, he lightly touched the side of her face. What was happening to him? Stephen wiped the sweat from his neck and hands and began to reflect on this recurring phenomenon. He reached for his notebook and started writing. As he processed his thoughts and feelings, it became apparent that these nightmares had consistently occurred on the nights after he had seen Jamie, a young counselee who had been sexually abused by his father. As he continued writing he also realized that in the last two sessions he had avoided helping Jamie experience the thoughts and feelings related to his abuse because it had been too painful *for him*, Stephen, to endure. He knew that in order for the trauma treatment to be effective he needed to be ready to help Jamie not only tell but experience his thoughts and feelings related to the abuse (Foa, Hembree, & Rothbaum, 2007). As a result of these insights, Stephen made a decision to initiate personal counseling and discuss these issues with a supervisor as soon as possible.

### **Implications for Ethical and Effective Practice**

Like our counselees, we too have been impacted by the ravages of the fall of man and bear the scars of the fall’s bio-psycho-social-spiritual devastation. We have had trauma and suffering that is stored as neurobiological galaxies with the potential to be triggered in situations that elicit the carefully tucked away affective and cognitive experiences they represent (Allen, 2001, Siegel, 2012). Keeping process notes is one way to responsibly steward ourselves and help insure

optimal functioning in this all too human field of counseling. It is my hope and prayer that you remain cognizant of your internal world as you work with the people God brings your way. You will soon find that it makes a difference for your health and the health of your counselees.

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