

Open Letter to Other Professionals on Psychological Assessment

Michael Bütz, PhD, Past-President & Acting Legislative Chair

There have been a number of comments made about Montana Psychological Association's approach to the matter of psychological assessments by those outside of the association, and this letter is to clarify the association's approach to this matter from the inception of the 2009 Legislative Session.

In actuality, if the truth were to be known, the association's thinking on these matters began with a joint meeting between the Board of Psychologists and the Board of Social Work Examiners and Professional Counselors April 25th, 2008. At this joint meeting on the matter of psychological assessment, both representatives from Montana Psychological Association (MPA) did not hold a "position" on the matter but instead the minutes reflected that:

"Dr. Bütz is in favor of others performing assessment within the bounds of the person's training, supervision, and experience. He stated that it is well-documented in the literature that psychological assessment is very complex. He distributed the 'American Psychological Association Guidelines for Test User Qualifications' that outlines the use of psychological assessment instruments and who is actually qualified to use them. There should be appropriate training, supervision, and experience for those who conduct psychological testing to ensure the public is protected..."

In turn, at that meeting, my colleague Barton Evans, Ph.D. also offered a similar view and put forward the Society for Personality Assessment's: "Standards for Education and Training in Psychological Assessment". For those not familiar with this society, it is made up of a variety of professionals including counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. Dr. Evans was one of the co-authors of these standards, and he served on the board for the society at this time. To be clear, at this meeting, there was no position taken by the association; only impressions of the thinking of MPA's membership and suggestions.

As the 2009 Legislative Session approached our association was preparing to follow-through on promises we had made to Senator Weinberg after he introduced a prescription privileges bill in the 2007 Legislative Session. Many may not be aware that he had introduced this bill in 2007 without informing MPA. He introduced the bill because of the need he saw throughout the state with regard to prescriptive services in his position as Chairman of the Senate Public Health and Human Services Committee. He had become aware that psychologists with several more years of additional training, supervision and experience beyond their doctorate were prescribing in the Armed Services and New Mexico.

In these preparations we came to know of a bill being introduced that would allow other providers to practice psychological assessments. We thought carefully about what position we might take, and after much discussion felt we should apply the same maxim to the matter of psychological assessment as we applied to prescription privileges. In short, that those wishing to supply this additional service, would need to be vetted for their training, supervision and experience at a level commensurate with known national standards in order to protect the public. In turn, we looked to the different standards available and took the standpoint that the Society for Personality Assessment standard was the most appropriate model. It did not require the same level of training, supervision and experience demanded of psychologists, and yet set an accessible benchmark that would also protect the public. Then, we also offered a model standard out of Wisconsin where this very vetting process already existed. Parenthetically, the prescription privileges language specified several years of graduate training beyond a doctorate degree, a lengthy period of supervision that followed, and a national examination.

What we came to find as an association was that not only did this bill on psychological assessment not include any requirements for training, supervision or experience; but it opened up psychological assessment to professionals that likely had limited exposure to even fundamental coursework on these matters, i.e. "...physicians, social workers, lawyers, pastoral counselors, professional counselors licensed under Title 37, chapter 23, or educators." There were, in fact, no thresholds—no minimum standards put forward other than the provider's own appraisal of their capabilities. As an association we felt that this was unsupportable, as the language of the bill did not check the credentials of these professionals and ultimately in our view it did not protect the public.

Our stance throughout the 2009 Legislative Session and since has not wavered as it is our collective professional opinion that psychological assessment is a very complex process that has a life-altering impact on those who are evaluated. It requires graduate level training, supervision and experience akin to the Standards proposed by the Society for Personality Assessment to consistently conduct these assessments in a minimally safe fashion that protects the public. With no checks, no review, there is a substantially increased potential for harming the public.

In closing it is my hope that this open letter clarifies our association's approach to this matter; note that we do support others in conducting psychological assessments so long as they have the minimum level of training, supervision and experience per recognized standards, and, the reasons we have felt compelled to be stalwart in our efforts to protect the public from potential harm.

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Congratulations



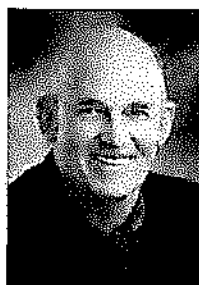
2012 Recipient of the Charles Kelly Award Michele McKinnie, PsyD, PC

Selected by a panel of her peers, Michele McKinnie, Psy.D. was presented with the 2012 Charles Kelly Award. The Charles Kelly Award is given to a distinguished psychologist for their outstanding professional contributions to Montana Psychology. Michele's contributions to her community, profession and the association's board were deciding factors.

Board Service Appreciation Awards



Susan Mattocks, Psy.D.



William Patenaude, Ph.D.

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