

SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH SYSTEM  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND RECOVERY SERVICES

DATE: April 5, 1996

BHRS POLICY: 96-01

SUBJECT: Trainees/Unpaid Extra-Help Employees

AUTHORITY: BHRS Policy 98-14, Fingerprinting of Interns, Trainees, Community Workers and Volunteers; San Mateo County HR Policy

AMENDED: Amended January 11, 1999, January 15, 2004 and May 8, 2013

#### BACKGROUND

Behavioral Health and Recovery Services has encouraged clinicians and individuals from the general public and from the family/client community to volunteer their services at administrative offices and regional clinic sites. While doing so, BHRS has consistently emphasized that recipients of our services have an absolute and inviolable legal right to privacy and safety in the treatment situation. Requiring fingerprinting and background checks has become the primary method available to assure the integrity of individuals working with clients in our system of care.

Because County Human Resources is unable to process fingerprints and initiate a background check for volunteers working in Behavioral Health Services, BHRS is establishing a policy that limits most unpaid individuals working in our system to licensed or license-eligible clinicians. On a trial basis, a small number of slots may be available for peers/family members to provide supportive services at clinical sites.

#### PURPOSE

- To establish guidelines and standards regarding the use of unpaid clinicians in Behavioral Health and Recovery Services; and
- To clarify the changes in role when a trainee continues working in BHRS upon graduation from the placing educational facility.
- To identify a small pilot project utilizing peer/family member volunteers.

## POLICY

Before a qualified applicant can begin to work within BHRS, fingerprint clearance must be on file with the BHRS Payroll/Personnel specialist. Word of mouth or paper confirmation of previous fingerprint checks will not be accepted for an individual applying for a paid or unpaid position in BHRS.

Absent an alternative method to obtain fingerprints and background checks, BHRS has changed the way it accepts volunteers from the community whose anticipated work will involve a face-to-face relationship for the care and/or security of clients and/or families, and/or will involve access to county funds. The following are common categories of applicants for unpaid positions in BHRS:

### County Employees

- Opportunities may be available for existing county staff from other divisions who are seeking hours for licensure or wishing to obtain clinical experience. These individuals must have fingerprints on record with County Human Resources.
- Licensed, registered or certified individuals must have their credentials reviewed and cleared by BHRS Quality Management according to existing practice before they are accepted for a clinical placement.
- All individuals who are licensed, registered, waived or certified who will work in a clinical role must maintain their status with their licensing board during the course of their clinical experience in BHRS.

### Trainees

- Trainees working with BHRS clients under a Memo of Understanding with a placing educational institution are offered stipends and therefore have fingerprints and criminal justice clearances on file with BHRS. (Under MOU's with their educational institutions and the brevity of the placement, certain nursing practicum students will be accepted as trainees with different fingerprinting protocols in place.)
- A trainee may continue working within BHRS after graduation as an extra-help clinical staff member.
- It is critical to understand that a graduated trainee cannot provide services prohibited by scope of practice until the graduated trainee is registered with the BBS. The graduated (but unregistered) clinician will continue to require co-signatures on the Treatment Plan, diagnosis, and mental status exam. The graduated (but unregistered) clinician may not provide therapy services. The designation of the graduated, but not yet registered or waived, individual must be changed in Avatar to a counselor role.
- Once the graduated trainee is registered with the BBS or has a DMH waiver (psychologists only), all rights and privileges of a licensed staff member are available to that individual. The registration must be reported and cleared by Quality Management and the Avatar registration will again be changed to reflect the registration.

- The registered or waived unpaid extra-help staff member will have credentials verified by Quality Management at the same frequency as all other clinicians.
- The registered or waived unpaid extra-help staff member must provide new clients with documentation that they are not licensed (see BHRS Policy 01-04).

### Unaffiliated Clinicians Seeking a Volunteer Placement

- Supervisors wishing to utilize the “voluntary” services of a specific individual should consult with the appropriate manager about the costs and benefits of doing this. Because a volunteer will be initially hired by BHRS, factors to consider will include:
  - Whether there are sufficient funds available to create a stipended position. This would include the costs incurred by BHRS and County Human Resources for the process of clearing and essentially hiring this person as well as the costs for whatever stipend was offered. BHRS HR estimates that it takes 3.5 to 5 hours of HR time to process and hire a new employee.
  - The willingness of the individual to complete a San Mateo County job application and to commit to sufficient hours over an extended period of time to justify the considerable initial expenses.
  - A six month commitment is the usual minimum obligation.
- The manager must approve a request to process the paper work to bring an individual on board in a stipended position and then in an unpaid extra-help position. (Most stipended positions have a start and end date, after which the individual holds an unpaid extra-help clinical position).
- No individuals other than trainees continuing in an uninterrupted status post graduation shall be brought on board during the gap between graduation from a graduate level program and becoming registered or waived.

### Peers/Family Members

- With the approval of the Workforce Development Director, a very limited number of volunteer slots may be available for peers/family members to work supportively in clinics.
  - Unit Chiefs wishing to employ a peer or family member will communicate with the Workforce Development Director about the availability of volunteer slots and the steps to take before bringing someone onto their team.
  - All considerations (described above) for the unpaid employee about time commitment, willingness to apply for employment, fingerprint clearance, etc. remain in effect.
  - Potential roles could include welcoming and support in lobbies, helping guide consumers to available services, etc., assistance during supportive group activities, etc.

### General Information

- Volunteers must be 18 years of age or older.

- Volunteers must have a designated supervisor who shall be responsible for the development of a placement that is mutually beneficial for BHRS and for the individual.
- One-time or occasional volunteer presenters at an event or psycho-educational group at which clients are present may be utilized, with supervisor/manager approval. Such speakers may include but are not limited to current or past clients/family members or content experts in an area of interest.

Note: Sponsors of volunteer presenters are responsible to have the presenter sign the County Oath of Confidentiality, and to discuss the critical importance of confidentiality prior to the event.

Approved: Signature on File  
Stephen Kaplan, Director  
Behavioral Health and Recovery Services

Approved: Signature on File  
Kristin Dempsey  
Workforce Development Director