Introduction

The Paper Office for the Digital Age is about using *both* paper and digital means for planning and documenting your work, communicating with clients and colleagues, marketing your psychotherapy practice, maintaining legal records, dealing with finances, and handling many other aspects of running your business. This book offers digital as well as print versions of the essential forms and client education handouts you need for your practice. Whether you copy or print them out, you need *paper* versions of forms for a range of documents that require clients' legal signatures; there are also good reasons to stick with paper charts, including client confidentiality, your own comfort, and protection against loss of electronic data. Many of you will choose to have "hybrid" practices in which you use paper documentation but also use electronic technologies. Whether you are a novice or an experienced practitioner, this book is designed to help you.

Ways This Book Can Help You

If you are a clinician just entering independent practice who wishes to start up a practice properly, this book will help you get organized and develop good professional habits. It will make your practice

- less vulnerable (and you therefore less anxious) when you are doing clinical work,
- more efficient because so many details are already taken care of, and
- more stable and profitable as a business.

All of this should make you more satisfied with your career as a therapist. This book cannot contain everything you should know to be in independent practice. However, it does contain what we believe you need to make the correct initial decisions about office practices and paperwork, and so it will help you start out right.

If you have been in private practice for a few years, this book can help you to update your practice to conform to current legal and ethical developments. We live in a world that has become far more litigious, and in which we are far more closely monitored, than in decades past. Standards of professional practice and conduct have evolved rapidly, becoming ever more complex and subtle. Licensing boards, government agencies, and third-party payers are watching more carefully. Private practice has become more difficult because of the anxieties raised by malpractice cases and board complaints. For all of us, the remedies for this anxiety lie in increasing our coping skills (such as by acquiring particular expertise), developing more accurate perceptions and more realistic understanding of the issues, and taking preventative actions against threats. As therapists, our best defenses against malpractice, complaints, and investigations are to offer high-quality and thoughtful care, use rational and effective procedures, and document our reasons and decisions thoroughly.

The resources in this book are carefully tailored to meet each of these needs. *The Paper Office for the Digital Age* provides the basic operational "tools" for private practice needed by psychotherapists of any orientation, training level, or discipline—social workers, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, psychiatrists, or psychologists. The guidelines and principles are widely shared, and so the forms and client education materials can be adapted and applied to your practice, no matter what your discipline is.

It should be emphasized *that The Paper Office for the Digital Age* is designed for the solo practitioner and the small-group practice. It may not meet the needs of a large or diverse group, agency, criminal justice setting, school, or military practice. In addition, the book's forms and other materials are designed only for outpatient settings.

What This Book Contains

This book provides both practical information and ready-to-use resources:

- Brief guidelines and checklists alert you to the most important legal and ethical issues, and direct you in developing solid working procedures.
- Sample documents and reproducible forms and handouts offer effective ways to meet specific challenges to your practice. Digital versions of the forms and handouts, included on the CD, allow you to adapt them to your specific needs.
- Discussions explain and contextualize the relevant issues and offer specifics and subtleties. This book is designed to function as "a malpractice risk reduction kit."

The forms and other materials offered are administrative and procedural, as well as clinical. They organize information to support the delivery of clinical services and to protect both you and your clients. These materials will help you to do the following:

- Understand and manage the financial side of practice, including fees and dealing with managed care organizations (MCOs).
- Efficiently collect such client information as demographic data and insurance coverage.
- Document each client's presenting problems, mental status, and risk factors.
- Organize the intake information into diagnoses, prognoses, and treatment plans.
- Make and keep all your records so that they meet current federal legal standards for privacy and security—especially those of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996. You are expected and assumed to know your local legal rules and standards.
- Comply with ethical and legal standards in getting fully informed consent to evaluate, treat, release records, and so on.

- Respond proactively to the need for boundary clarifications and maintenance, and so the prevention of many ethical violations.
- Relate to MCOs, supervisees, students, and trainees in legal and ethical ways.
- Reduce your risk of malpractice suits, licensing board complaints, and similar problems.

This book assumes that you, the reader, are already a fully trained clinician. It assumes that you know how to do evaluations and therapy, and that you deal with clients and their families. Therefore, the forms offered in this book are not forms for collecting data on symptoms or dynamics. For example, although you are offered a way of summarizing a client's mental status (Form 6.17), you are not given any tests or protocol of questions to collect the data the form summarizes. If you need questions to assess a client's presentation, history, symptoms, and mental status, and the words to describe these, you can find these in the *Clinician's Thesaurus* (Zuckerman, 2010), which contains the entire language of mental health.

Unique Features

We have made efforts to incorporate various professions' ethical standards, principles, and guidelines into each form, handout, and sample document. This avoids the remoteness of reading about abstract principles, the narrowness of individual case studies, and the possibility of overlooking the necessary application of an important principle in your practice's procedures and paperwork. After the principles are learned through these applications, they can be more easily applied to new situations through your sensitized and enhanced ethical reasoning.

The forms and other materials have been designed and updated to meet current legal and ethical standards for the practice of psychotherapy in the various disciplines. As you know, there are significant differences in these standards by state, discipline, and population. To be comprehensive, this book tries to include points or issues raised in any jurisdiction. We believe it is very likely that concerns now raised in only a few places will eventually be applied in every location, and so these should be addressed now. The courts, the mass media, and the public have generally not paid attention to the differences among the professions, and so the book is inclusive in this respect as well. It will always be important, however, to monitor local developments and changes as an ongoing aspect of your practice.

Crucially, **you must know your local rules.** Although we have made sincere and extensive efforts to be complete, we cannot guarantee that these materials will meet *all* the ethical and legal rules of *all* professions and jurisdictions, particularly over time. Your best sources of current and localized information are your state's and discipline's organizations. Join them, contribute to them, and participate in them; doing so will make you more aware and sophisticated, and will keep your practice up to date. For example, psychologists who belong to the Pennsylvania Psychological Association (PPA) have had a much lower rate of licensing board complaints than nonmembers have (Sam Knapp, Professional Affairs Officer, PPA, personal communication, 2010).

In a similar vein, some readers have asked whether this book has been read and reviewed by lawyers. It has not, both because of the problem stated above of local and discipline differences, and because there would be some conflicting opinions that could not be resolved.

Instead, we have relied heavily on published articles that have had the benefit of peer review, and on books by authorities who represent the consensus or vanguard in the field.

How to Use This Book in Your Practice

If you are a beginning practitioner, we recommend that you start with the materials offered in "Quick Start," below.

If you are an experienced clinician, read the table of contents for the forms and other materials you think are most important to the way you currently practice. There may be some you know you should implement to meet ethical and legal standards; others will make you more efficient and help you become better organized. Some will be new to your practice, and others will update materials you have been using.

The chapters of the book start with the administrative, financial, ethical, and legal foundations of practice (Chapters 1–5), and then follow the sequence of a case from intake to termination (Chapters 6–7). In-depth discussions of confidentiality and releasing records (Chapter 8) and of marketing (Chapter 9) round out the book. The sections within chapters are generally organized as follows:

- The **background** you need to make use of the forms or other materials is offered first. Much of this information is displayed for rapid learning in the form of guidelines and checklists.
- The **legal and ethical aspects** of the forms or sample documents are described next, along with options for modifying them for your own practice.
- The **model forms** or other materials are then presented.

Quick Start: Recommended Core Materials

The materials below can be produced for your practice in just a few minutes for a few cents. The forms as printed in the book can be photocopied or can be downloaded from the CD and printed from your computer. They are designed to look professional. On these forms, a space at the top is provided for your own letterhead. If you anticipate using a small label on your paperwork to identify the client by name, ID number, barcode, or something similar, you can offset your "letterhead" information to the left and leave room for the label on the right side. If you want to modify the forms or tailor them to your practice, the CD contains the text of almost every form in a common word processor format.

The following are the basic forms for any client intake. First will be the Client Information Brochure (see Chapter 5), Handout 5.1, or one of the other methods for aiding a client in providing informed consent to treatment, as described in Chapter 5. Then come these forms:

Form 6.1	First-contact record
Form 6.3	Notice of privacy practices (unabridged)
Form 6.4	Notice of privacy practices (brief version)
Form 6.5	Consent to privacy practices
Form 6.6	Adult client information form 1

Form 6.7	Adult client information form 2
Form 6.8	Health information form
Form 6.10	Financial information form
Form 7.2	Case progress note, structured

Depending on what you learn about the client during the intake, any of the following could be appropriate:

Form 6.9	Chemical use survey
Form 6.12	Adult checklist of concerns
Form 6.13	Child checklist of characteristics
Form 6.17	Mental status evaluation checklist
Form 6.19	Suicide risk assessment summary and recommendations
Form 8.2	Form for requesting or releasing confidential records and information

If you expect the client to use health insurance that is managed, the managed care organization (MCO) is likely to want the information from this form:

Form 6.20 Intake summary and case formulation

We suggest that you use the forms for 3 months with every new (and some old) clients. When you start, mark the end of the 3-month period in your appointment book. Then relax and focus on doing a fine job as a therapist. After 3 months, review how well the forms are working for you. Decide which additional forms you want to incorporate into your practice, or what changes you need to make to fit them better into your practice. Make any modifications or additions, and write to us with your suggestions and criticisms. If you make changes, please see the section below on sharing your changes.

Availability of Materials on CD

To save you time and effort, all the forms and handouts you might use in your practice are available on the CD inside the back cover. The materials are supplied in two formats, so virtually any computer can open and display them. Instructions for using the CD are on the last page of this book.

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The comments about HIPAA and its regulations reflect our own interpretations from reading the Act and other resources, and have not been reviewed by lawyers. We offer general guidance, as opposed to legal advice. The wording of the HIPAA forms is ours and is designed for small practices. HIPAA is discipline-blind and encourages practitioners to use language tailored to their settings, clients, and practices.

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Send your complaints and suggestions to this address:

Keely Kolmes, PsyD
220 Montgomery Street, Suite 400
San Francisco, CA 94104

Or send an email to Dr. Kolmes (drkkolmes@gmail.com).

As this field develops, this book will continue to be revised to meet the needs of practicing clinicians. It is our hope that by sharing the best efforts and ideas we have been able to borrow, modify, and devise—and by learning from you, our readers, in turn—this book will make your professional life easier and more productive, and will further the professional development of all practitioners of the craft of therapy.