Law and Advocacy

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The legal issue I selected involves the legislative expansion of the Counseling Compact and the inclusion of counselors in federal Medicare reimbursement structures. From an ethical standpoint, these legal hurdles create significant issues regarding the principle of Justice, which requires that all people have equal access to mental health care regardless of age or geographic location. Currently, when clients transition to Medicare or move across state lines, they often face a forced termination of the therapeutic relationship because their counselor is not legally recognized in the new jurisdiction or insurance plan.

The complexity of professional relationships and private practice settings often creates systemic barriers that counselors must navigate (Remley and Herlihy, 2024). These legal restrictions can lead to an "interruption of services," which may cause clinical harm. Ethical practice requires counselors to advocate for policies that protect the welfare of the client and ensure that administrative laws do not supersede clinical needs. This issue is deeply meaningful because it directly impacts the professional identity and clinical efficacy of counselors. The law is a persistent reality in clinical practice, noting that "the law's involvement in the clinical process is a reality that cannot be ignored" (Appelbaum and Gutheil, 2007). As a counselor, I am motivated to bridge the gap between clinical intent and legal restriction.

Additionally, managing professional boundaries is a core competency. Maintaining clear boundaries is essential for the therapeutic alliance (Jacob et al., 2022). I believe that having a stable, legally recognized professional framework through the Compact allows counselors to maintain these boundaries more effectively during transitions of care. Without such legal protections, counselors are often forced into "grey areas" of practice that can lead to ethical

compromises. To create change, I followed the strategic steps outlined in the ACA Advocacy Toolkit and the ACA Advocating for the Counseling Profession as a Graduate Student guide:

1. Identification: I used the ACA's legislative tracker to identify active bills in my state and at the federal level that impact counselor portability.
2. Formulation: I developed a letter using the "Voter Voice" sample from the toolkit, modifying it to include my personal experience as a student intern.
3. Targeting: I identified my representative's office and determined if they sat on committees related to health or education (ACA Advocacy Toolkit, n.d.).
4. Delivery: I submitted the communication through the representative's official web portal to ensure it was recognized as a constituent concern.

My primary take-away from this project is that advocacy is a core professional responsibility. Counselors must serve as agents of systemic change in the public arena to address the social and political factors that affect client well-being (Lee and Rodgers, 2009). I realized that my voice as a graduate student is a powerful tool; legislators often lack specific expertise in mental health and rely on the "grassroots" stories of practitioners to understand the human impact of policy (ACA Advocating for the Counseling Profession as a Graduate Student, n.d.). Moving forward, I view advocacy not as an "extra" task, but as a clinical necessity to ensure the health and longevity of the counseling profession.

References

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