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OUTPATIENT SERVICES CONTRACT

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. I realize this document is long and covers mostly legalistic and procedural issues regarding psychological treatment, thus it may not be your primary focus at this time. Though some of the issues may not seem pertinent to you or the concern for which you are coming in, it is my belief that by coming to an understanding of these issues in the beginning, it will allow us more time and energy in our sessions to focus on your concerns during the sessions.

Please read this document carefully and jot down any questions that you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personality of both the therapist and the patient and the particular problems the patient brings. There are a number of different approaches that can be utilized to address the problems you hope to address. Unlike other types of health services, psychotherapy requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and between sessions.

Psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. Risks sometimes include experiencing uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. Psychotherapy often requires discussing unpleasant aspects of your life. Psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who undertake it. Therapy often leads to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, better relationships, and resolutions of specific problems. But there is no guarantee about what will happen with you.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what our work will include and an initial treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue. You should evaluate this information along with your own assessment about whether you feel comfortable working with me. After the initial consultation, I generally ask new clients to fill out a personality assessment inventory and possibly some other questionnaires. I believe these are important

as part of the initial assessment process and in helping our work together. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you to secure an appropriate consultation with another mental health professional.

Most of the time, people are seeking individual therapy, but if you are seeking therapy where there is more than one client involved (such as couples therapy), you need to be aware additional issues. When a couple comes in it is usually with the desire to strengthen the relationship or to help it come to a peaceful end. It is best for everyone involved to talk about his or her expectations upon entering therapy. The therapist's role is to facilitate the communication process between the parties involved so that each person can make the best decision as it relates to the his or her own self, the partner, and the relationship.

Sometimes one partner is unable to come to couples therapy due to illness or another unavoidable circumstance. Because couples therapy depends upon both partners being there, it is important that both attend therapy. The research literature has shown that one-partner "couples therapy" usually results in a negative outcome for the couple (Wilcoxon & Fenell, 1983). If one person is unable to attend, it is suggested that you cancel the appointment. But, please be aware that appointments not canceled 24 hours in advance will be charged for the scheduled time. If it is the case that one of the couple drops out of therapy, then the remaining partner and the therapist can discuss the possibility of doing individual therapy, understanding the risks for the relationship as stated above.

MEETINGS

My normal practice is to conduct an evaluation that will last from 2 to 5 sessions. During this time, we can decide whether I am an appropriate person to provide the services needed to meet your treatment objectives. If psychotherapy is initiated, I will usually schedule one fifty-minute session (one appointment hour of fifty minutes duration) per week at a mutually agreed time, although sometimes sessions will be longer or more frequent.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

Fees vary according to the type and length of the service provided. I am happy to provide the charge for any service not listed in this document. In order to reduce your out-of-pocket costs, I provide a fee reduction of 20% for any psychological service when payment is made in full at any time before the completion of the hour of that service for which you are being charged.

Initial Consultation (Diagnostic Interview):

My hourly appointment fee is \$250 for an Initial Consultation – our first meeting together. If you pay for an hour of individual therapy at the time of the meeting, the charge will be reduced by 20% (or \$50) and you will pay a total of \$200.

Individual Therapy:

My hourly appointment fee is \$225 for individual therapy. If you pay for an hour of individual therapy at the time of the meeting, the charge will be reduced by 20% (or \$45) and you will pay a total of \$180.

Couples Therapy:

My hourly appointment fee is \$225 for couples therapy. If you pay for an hour of couples therapy at the time of the meeting, the charge will be reduced by 20% (or \$45) and you will pay a total of \$180.

In addition to weekly appointments, it is my practice to charge my hourly fee on a prorated basis for other professional services you may require such as report writing, telephone conversations which last longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings or consultations with other professionals which you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, or the time required to perform any other service which you may request of me.

If you become involved in litigation that requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for the professional time required even if I am compelled to testify by another party. Because of the complexity and difficulty of legal involvement, I charge double my maximum hourly service fee per hour for preparation for and attendance at any legal proceeding.

LATE CANCELATIONS AND MISSED APPOINTMENTS: Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide at least 24 hours advance notice of cancelation (unless another arrangement has been made). Cancelations should be made by telephone or email (text messages cancelations will not be accepted). Please do not consider an appointment canceled until you have heard a confirmation from the therapist.

The charge for a missed appointment or late cancelation is not a charge for a service, but rather is a charge for a missed business opportunity. Thus, a missed appointment or late cancelation is not reimbursable by third-party payers such as insurance companies. If you miss an appointment or cancel an appointment with less than a 24-hour notice, you will be charged directly regardless of previous billing arrangements.

The fee for a missed appointment or appointment canceled with less than a 24-hour notice is 80% of the full fee rate (or \$180). This fee is due and payable within 30 days of the missed or canceled appointment.

FEE INCREASES: Fee increases are scheduled to take place each year. A fee increase may be up to a maximum of 9% of the total fee paid (generally \$5-\$15 per session). Clients will be given a 60-day notice before any fee increases are made.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session or other service within 30 days of the completion of that service unless we have a written agreement otherwise or I have a contract with a payment entity (such as an business organization or insurance company) that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to at the time these services are requested.

For your convenience, payment may be made by check, cash, and some forms of ATM and credit cards. If you choose to have me bill you or any other entity for payment after the time of the service, I do require permission to charge a current credit card if fees are not paid by some other means within 90 days of the service. If you encounter an unusual financial hardship and we have an established therapeutic relationship in place, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or installment payment plan.

If your account is more than 60 days in arrears (a total of 90 days past the date of service) and suitable arrangements for payment have not been agreed to, a late fee of 10% will be added and then again at the end of each 12 month period the fee is not paid. I have the option of using legal means to secure payment, including collection agencies or small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, the costs of bringing that proceeding will be included in the claim. In most cases, the only information that I release about a client's treatment would be the clients name, the nature of the services provided, and the amount due.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

If you do not plan on seeking reimbursement through your insurance company for my services, then this section may not apply to you (and you may wish to skip to the next section). If you do plan on submitting an insurance claim in order to seek reimbursement, please read this section carefully.

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources are available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will provide you with whatever assistance I can in facilitating your receipt of the benefits to which you are entitled including filling out forms as appropriate. However, you, and not your insurance company, are responsible for full payment of the fee we have agreed to. Therefore, it is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet describes mental health services. If you have questions, you should call your plan administrator and inquire. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to try to assist you in deciphering the information you receive from your carrier. If necessary to resolve confusion, I am willing to call the carrier on your behalf.

The escalation of the cost of health care has resulted in an increasing level of complexity about insurance benefits that sometimes makes it difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. Insurance companies may base your coverage upon a clinical diagnosis, plan type, service received (such as individual vs. couples therapy), or other restriction. Thus, if you are planning to submit your receipts for insurance reimbursement, it may be helpful for you to call your plan administrator and ask the specific terms of coverage.

Please note: I do not participate on the panels of "Managed Health Care Plans" such as HMO's and PPO's. Thus, if you have one of these particular types of plans and you wish to

see me for psychotherapy, it is very important for you to find out the availability of coverage for an “out-of-network psychologist.” If we are able to work together under one of these plans, your insurance company may require advance authorization before they will provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans often require a short-term treatment approach designed to resolve specific problems that are interfering with one’s usual level of functioning. In my experience, while quite a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, many clients feel that more services are necessary after insurance benefits expire.

You should also be aware that most insurance agreements require you to authorize me to provide a clinical diagnosis, and sometimes additional clinical information such as a treatment plan or summary, or in rare cases, a copy of the entire record. *This information will become part of the insurance company files*, and, in all probability, some of it will be made part of an electronic data bank. All insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, but once it is in their hands, I have no control over what they do with it. In some cases they may share the information with a national medical information data bank. If you request it, I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if the insurance benefits run out before you feel ready to end our sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my service yourself and avoid the complexities described above.

If you plan on seeking insurance reimbursement, please note the following process I follow:

Regarding payment, you will pay for each session yourself following policies and procedures in the “Professional Fees” and “Billing and Payments” sections of this document. I will provide you with a statement detailing the charges. If you wish to receive insurance reimbursement, you will submit the statement to your insurance company along with properly filled-out claim forms. It will be your responsibility to request the reimbursement from the insurance company. It is important to remember that I have no control over your insurance company’s policies and reimbursement procedures. However, I will assist you to the best of my ability in this process.

If you request that I bill a third-party directly, I may agree to do so as a courtesy to you. However, if the third-party does not pay the full amount billed, you will be responsible for payment of the remainder up to and including the entire amount billed and any applicable late fees. All policies and procedures in the “Professional Fees” and “Billing and Payments” sections of this document continue to apply. I reserve the right to terminate an agreement to bill a third-party at any time.

CONTACTING ME

Telephone: I am often available by telephone if you call the number listed at the top of this document. However, due to fact that I work in several different locations, I will have your call forwarded to a voicemail system that I monitor frequently. Please note that it is always important to leave your area code and telephone number as sometimes I may get your message when I am out of the office and I may not have your file immediately available. I

usually will not return the phone call immediately when I am with a client or otherwise unavailable. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please leave some times when you will be available. If I am unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you may contact if necessary.

Email: If you plan to contact me by email, please be aware of several issues. Email communication is generally not secure and could fall into the wrong hands and compromise your confidentiality. It is recommended that you limit emails sent to me to brief and non-clinical matters, such as setting an appointment. The other concern is that email is generally a slower and, at times, less reliable method of communication than the telephone. If your communication has any time urgency, such as canceling an appointment within 24-hours, it is strongly suggested that you make a telephone call to me and leave a voicemail message in addition to any email.

Text Messages: Because of unreliability, text messaging NOT recommended as a means of communication with me. Appointment cancelations will not be accepted through text messages. Text messages are fine for one-way communications such as letting me know you are running late or of an accomplishment during the week.

Postal Mail: If you wish to contact me by postal mail, it is recommended that you use the mailing address at the top of this document. Mail received at that address is held in a locked mailbox.

Urgent Matters (and Paging): If you need to communicate with me about an urgent matter, then after leaving me a detailed voicemail message, you may also have me paged by calling the same telephone number and following the directions on the voicemail. I generally try to return phone calls within one business day. If you cannot wait for a return phone call, and you believe you are having a psychiatric emergency, follow the emergency procedure listed below:

In Case of Emergency:

If you are dealing with a life threatening or other type of psychiatric emergency, you should first call 911 or go to the emergency room at the nearest hospital and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on-call. Then, after you have secured emergency services, you (or a designate) may contact me and alert me of the situation.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

Both law and the standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of the records, but if you wish, I can prepare an appropriate summary. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or can be upsetting to lay readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. I will also be happy to forward the summary to another appropriate mental health professional that is working with you. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any preparation time required to comply with an

information request. ***Please note:*** If we do any therapy where there is more than one client (such as couples therapy), *all* of the adults present will have to sign a release.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In general, law protects the confidentiality of all communications between a client and a psychologist, and I can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. However, there are a number of legally defined exceptions.

In most judicial proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. However, in some circumstances such as child custody proceedings and proceedings in which your emotional condition is an important element, a judge may require my testimony if he/she determines that resolution of the issues before him/her demands it.

There are some situations in which I am legally required to take action to protect others from harm, even though that requires revealing some information about a client's treatment. For example, if I have a reasonable suspicion that a child, an elderly person, or a dependant person is being abused, I am required by law to file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required by law to take protective actions, which may include notifying that potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization. If a client threatens to harm him/herself, I may be required to seek hospitalization for the client, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely arisen in my practice. Should such a situation occur, I make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult about a case with other professionals. In these consultations, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. The consultant is, of course, also legally bound to keep the information confidential. Unless you object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions you may have at our next meeting. The laws governing these issues are quite complex and I am not an attorney. While I am happy to discuss these issues with you, should you need specific advice, formal legal consultation may be desirable. If you request, I will provide you with relevant portions or summaries of the applicable state laws governing these issues.

FINAL WORDS

Though Los Angeles is a large city, the community in which we live sometimes seems small. There may be times when we run into each other outside of the therapy office. Sometimes these are awkward situations and sometimes they are not. If we do see each other, I will

follow your lead as to whether I say “hello” or not. Please know that I will not reveal the fact that you are a client. You, however, are free to reveal (or not reveal) any information you wish.

Miscommunication between provider and client is one of the primary reasons for dissatisfaction in healthcare relationships. Please make notes and clarify any questions you have about this document or any other aspects of treatment with me during our next session, or if you would like, by telephone before our next session. Unless determined otherwise, the information in this document will describe our professional relationship. You are welcome to discuss the terms of this document at any time. You also may request an updated version (if available) at any time or by viewing it in the client forms area of <http://www.drgregcason.com>. Again, welcome to my practice and I look forward to our work together.