

Psychotherapists and Electronic Media Position Statement

Electronic Media

It is intended that the following document will inform the profession and stakeholders as to the Board's position on Electronic Media.

The Board's purpose is: *'to protect the health and safety of members of the public by providing for mechanisms to ensure that health practitioners are competent and fit to practise their professions'*.

The Board accepts that psychotherapists make use of electronic media for writing records and reports, for emailing, telephoning, and, perhaps, for texting. Some psychotherapists also use various forms of social media in their private lives and to communicate with colleagues around the world. Some psychotherapists use electronic media with clients in their clinical work and supervision with supervisees or supervisors.

While there are many advantages in making use of such media, there are also potential risks to the safety of the public and to practitioners in the use of electronic media. The Board recommends that practitioners are alert to such potential risks. New developments in technology are made constantly; some or all of these may have the potential for harming the public, whether used by a practitioner in clinical work, in arranging appointments or messaging, or by a practitioner in their private capacity. It is therefore important to exercise caution and care in all of these situations.

In any cases brought to its attention, the Board refers to its Ethical Guidelines as standards for psychotherapists to protect the safety of the public. Electronic media can be associated with risks to the safety of the public in such contexts as:

- privacy, confidentiality, safe storage
- adequacy of information for clients about credentials, services
- duty of care to client
- limited depth of psychotherapeutic relating
- clarity of contracts
- assessment of client, including client's context and jurisdiction
- clarity of communication (including procedures for checking that messages sent are the ones that the practitioner intended to send)
- adequacy of practitioner training in the use of the media
- adequacy of the electronic media used, including updated security systems.

The Board's Ethical Standards state that a psychotherapist shall "Hold the needs and well-being of clients paramount, giving priority to the psychotherapeutic aspect of the relationship with clients" (PBANZ Psychotherapist Standards of Ethical Conduct 1.1.1).

The Board therefore holds the position that any use of electronic media by a psychotherapist must hold client safety as a top priority and minimise its use where it may detract from the psychotherapeutic aspect of the relationship between psychotherapist and client.

Approved by the Board December 2014