

## **Counseling Practicum**

### **Lecture 5**

#### **Developing Counseling Competencies**

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#### **Introduction to Lecture 5**

This lecture will discuss areas of counseling competencies that a student counselor ought to develop to offer effective counseling services to their clients during practicum. These competencies are best developed from the onset of the program because some must build on others as you will discover in this class.

#### **Expected Learning Outcomes**

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- (i) Define counseling competence
- (ii) Identify areas of counseling competencies
- (iii) Discuss how counseling competencies can be developed

#### **Beginning Counselors**

To become a competent counselor and therapist is a journey that is full of anxiety and uncertainties. To be that effective professional counselor, a counseling student is required to develop several competencies to achieve their best in skills and knowledge ahead and during internship. The following is a list of skills internship students need to build.

Though not all practicum sites will provide all of them. By the end of the practicum period, an intern should assess themselves against the levels discussed in this class.

### **Communication Competencies**

- Clarity – the counselor should be clear in what they are saying to the client to avoid distorted communication
- Concise – this allows room to get communication raw as it is yet very clear and objective
- Participation and sharing in related activities through empathic communication
- Provide appropriate information to clients and supervisors
- Communicate with clients' significant others especially when need be
- Communicate effectively with referral sources
- Ethical duty to warn in case of emergencies to protect a life whether it is the client, or another party related to the client
- This set of communication skills and competencies are also enhanced by some course units like personal therapy, self-awareness and personal development, supervision, and counseling practice (Corey, 2009).

### **Writing Skills**

Writing skills are quite useful when conducting initial intake with all required details- personal data, mental status exam, diagnosis, psychosocial history, therapy goals (verbal

and non- verbal) , treatment goals and treatment planning as well as processing therapy sessions. Other areas that written skills are needed include.

- Writing client progress notes
- Charting and maintaining client records
- Preparing a well written treatment plan
- Preparing a formal written case study and notes
- Computer literacy
- Writing referral documents

### **Use of Professional Terms**

The student must understand and be able to apply and explain professional terms in counseling. The terms are drawn from the theories, techniques, and counseling related literature. The articulate use of the terms shows a developed counselor in terms of practice, skills competence and professional outlook and character.

### **Theoretical Base**

- Students need to know professional terms related to counseling psychology and how they relate to source /base theory or choice of their theoretical framework or counseling theory
- Students will be able to understand professional counseling theoretical jargon and will be able to participate in professional dialogue

- They should have a core theoretical model for their practice that pretty much relates to who they are and how they wish to be known as practitioners ( (McLeod, 2013)

### **Interviewing Skills**

The following competencies will show a well-prepared student who can conduct an effective interviewing session with clients:

- Students will structure the interview according to specific theoretical foundation
- Use appropriate skills and techniques in client work
- Collect relevant data for objective case management
- To develop holistic approach toward interviewing by assessing biological, environmental, and interpersonal factors that may have perpetuated the client's psychological disturbance
- Students will try to use client's frame of reference always (empathy)
- Develop intercultural communication
- Have multicultural competencies that can accommodate a diverse clientele

### **Making Diagnosis**

The students should be able to use assessment tools in therapy. Examples include personality tests, intelligence tests, alcohol addiction tests, mental health assessment, career placement and development assessment, stress related tests among others.

They should be able to determine when, how to use the tests and which is best suited test for clients. They should be able to use DSM IV- TR/ DSM - 5 and also devise own tools that fit client needs and cultural context.

They should also be able to review and consider all relevant client data including interviews, previous psychiatric history, medical reports, test results, psychosocial history, consultations, and DSM classifications in formulating a diagnostic impression or preliminary diagnosis.

### **Treatment Planning**

Students should be able to set treatment goals and treatment plans and map out the most effective ways to follow the goals, accomplish them and complete treatment. This involves ability to put theories and techniques learnt into practice with clients, choose own theoretical framework, develop therapy focused treatment plans (from treatment contacting, implementation to termination) and conduct the following types of treatment therapies and modalities: conjoint therapy, crisis intervention, family therapy, group therapy, Individual therapy, marital therapy, child therapy and perform integrated multicultural intervention.

## **Theoretical Orientation**

The student should be able to choose the best theory in practice and at times since they are beginning counselors, at times they can mix the theories at the beginning and learn to master how and when to use different theories (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Some of the theories include psychodynamic therapies (focus on intense history taking, use of transference and counter transference material), cognitive behavioral therapies (thought processing, negative and positive patterns behaviors and thoughts), humanistic /existential therapies (self-awareness, control and self-actualization, search and pursuit of purpose driven goals), systemic therapies (family based systems approach) and multicultural theories (easy to cope with diversity in terms of cultural differences and orientation).

Other adjunct treatment modalities include group therapy, bibliotherapy, art therapy, play therapy, hydrotherapy, spiritual therapy (with related training in mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy and self-compassion) among others. Mindfulness and cognitive flexibility theories are proving to be useful due to the nature of commitment ownership by clients ( (Germer, 2009)

## **Case Management**

The student needs to be familiar with the department or organizational ways of handling client. They should know and relate well with site supervisors, colleagues and know how

to refer challenging cases, act as the client's advocate, participate in all areas of discharge including follow up with clients even after they leave therapy or rehabilitation and recovery facilities.

### **Practicum Site Operations and Administration**

The student should have thorough understanding of the site from organizational structure, culture, vision, mission, sources of funding for counseling activities, HR policy, other policies (e.g HIV), strategic plans, legal concerns. This helps them to fit in the company easily. Attending regular supervision sessions is not to be compromised despite challenges faced during practicum like lack of adequate time (Borders DiAnne & Brown, 2022). The rationale behind attending clinical supervision is to track the counselor journey and see how best to support them in that journey.

### **Professional Orientation**

The student should be able to know all ethical and legal codes for counselors whether provided by the agency, professional association(s) and/or the state and work within the same framework. He/she should seek guidance from site and/ or university supervisor (McLeod, 2013).

is important that students be aware of all that is required before internship especially the professional documents, site supervisors and the agency to work for. A well-prepared student is well equipped for internship with the above competencies. Regular

consultations, supervision and professional development is paramount to developing and practicing the above competencies (Jungers & Scott, *Securing a Practicum and Internship Site*, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The session has reviewed very important areas to consider when developing competencies suitable for internship. It is advisable to do a checklist with a rating to know where you may be deficient or in need of support.

## **References**

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