



Queries and Questions from Behavior Analysts

By Authors Jon Bailey and Mary Burch

Note to Readers: With this issue we are initiating a new feature in the FAB A Observer. Welcome to our new regular ethics column in which we will answer questions from FAB A readers about ethical situations encountered in the course of providing behavioral services. We'll address ethical dilemmas sent in by readers in a short, concise fashion.

This first scenario was presented to us in the workshop that we presented at the FAB A 2005 conference in Sarasota.

QUESTION: "In my consulting job as a behavior analyst, I have been working with a consumer who is a recipient of Med Waiver services. Recently, there was a break-down in the service authority approval process, meaning that my upcoming hours were not approved in writing. Should I still provide behavior analysis and oversight even if I do not have a written authorization?"



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ANSWER: The very nature of behavior analysis services (targeted, effective, data-based interventions for people in need) requires that services be provided on a consistent, systematic basis. These services should be provided by highly trained behavior analysts. We are certain, that if the services are interrupted, for whatever reason, the quality of the care that we provide will be low-grade and potentially harmful to the client. This gap in service delivery does not enhance the image of behavior analysts but rather suggests that we are simply in it for the money. If we want to be caring, effective behavior analysts we need to anticipate such problems and prepare our contingencies in advance.

The BACB Guidelines for Responsible Conduct cover situations like this in several places. BACB code 2.15 "Interrupting or terminating services" makes it quite clear in 2.15(a) that behavior analysts should prepare for interruptions including "financial limitations." In 2.15(b) there is an emphasis on "the welfare of each client" in the event of a break in services, and in 2.15(c) the code is explicit, "behavior analysts do not abandon clients." Further, in 2.15(d) behavior analysts are implored to "discuss the client's needs with the relevant parties" should it be necessary to terminate your services. This would presumably include not only your consulting firm or organization but also the Medicare Waiver agent responsible for the funding.

So, the short version is yes, you should, in the best interests of the client, continue to provide services. You must also, however, check with all the concerned parties and educate them as soon as possible about the negative impact such disruptions

can have on the client. It is simply not appropriate to continue to provide services for a long period of time without written authorization. If there is no written authorization, you should take immediate steps to, a) restore the funding, or b) recommend some other agency or individual who will be able to provide services.

And finally, if you find yourself in a situation where obtaining approval for services is an ongoing problem, it may be necessary for you to report the problem to the supervisor of the individuals who are responsible for approving services. In some cases, you might be dealing with a systems-level problem where the basic process for obtaining approval for behavioral services in a timely manner needs to be analyzed and modified. Consider consulting with a behavior analyst who also has expertise in Performance Management, she may be able to provide some guidance.

Note to readers: Please send your questions or scenarios to: Jon S. Bailey, PhD at: bailey@psy.fsu.edu In the subject line, please write "ETHICS ANYONE?" 

