



Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology

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Oral Examination Information for Candidates

General Information about the Exam

This is not an open book exam. No books or papers are permitted in the exam room. Electronic devices must be turned off and taping is not permitted. The content is confidential.

The Oral Examination Committee

Your committee will consist of two psychologists from the Board and a third psychologist from the community. Once your committee has been established, the Assistant to the Registrar will contact you with the names of the committee members and the date and time of the examination

The examiners will review your candidate file prior to the start of the examination.

The Format for the Examination

The Chair of the committee will introduce all parties and explain to you the three possible outcomes. These are pass, pass with conditions or fail (see below for more details). At this point you will be given the opportunity to ask questions.

The examiners conduct a semi-structured interview. You should be familiar with the four principals of the Canadian Code of Ethics. You are not expected to be able to recite the many standards that make up the Code but you are expected to be familiar with them. You are also expected to be able to apply the ethical decision making process to an ethical dilemma related to your area of practice. You will be asked to talk about your practice and to answer a series of questions reflecting issues that may arise in the course of it. You will also be expected to respond to questions involving familiarity with public policy related to your work, such as The Children and Family Services Act.

This examination will generally take between one and two hours. At the conclusion of the examination you will be asked to leave the room so that the committee members can

deliberate. After they have reached a decision you will be invited back into the room. You will be informed about the results of the examination and the Chair of the Committee will generally inform you of the rationale for the decision reached.

The Outcomes

- Pass
- Conditional Pass
- Fail
- Referral to Full Board

Pass:

The chair and committee members will provide you with feedback. You will be welcomed to Register of Psychologists.

Conditional Pass:

Under 14 (6) of the Psychologists Act (2000): *The Board may fix conditions, limitations and restrictions applicable to persons whose names are entered on the Registers.*

In the case where the Oral Committee identifies areas of deficit that are containable and do not limit readiness for or have negative implications for general practice, they may approve you to the Register of Psychologists but place a condition or restriction on your registration that would limit your practice in some manner. The reason for the restriction/condition will be explained to you and you will have the opportunity to ask questions. Normally you would also be informed of what would be required of you before the Board would consider an application to have the restriction/condition lifted.

Fail:

Should you fail, the examiners will discuss this decision with you and give you the opportunity to ask questions. They will summarize the examination results and refer you forward for a Full Board Oral. The Assistant to the Registrar will provide you with the date and time that this will take place. It generally occurs within the next month or two as the intent is to serve as a reliability check with respect to the first result rather than to provide you with an additional preparation time.

At the Full Board Oral, the Board has the same three decisions available as the Oral Examination Committee. If they confirm the failure, you will generally not be allowed to re-take the oral examination until you have completed some form of remedial process. A remedial plan is developed on an individual basis to meet your specific needs. The Assistant to the Registrar will provide you with additional information should this be the outcome of your examination.

Should you fail on your second attempt and should the second Full Board Oral confirm the failure, you may be removed from the Candidate Register under 14. (7) of the Psychologists Act for failing to meet a condition of your Candidacy.

Referral to Full Board:

In the rare event that Committee members cannot reach consensus about their decision with respect to a pass, pass with conditions, or failure, you will be referred to the full Board for a second Oral Examination. You will subsequently be informed of the date and time that this will take place. It generally occurs within the next month or two

Revisions: 22nd June 2015
2nd April, 2012
8th June 2010;
19th October 2007

NOVA SCOTIA BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN PSYCHOLOGY

Criteria for Evaluating Candidates

GENERAL:

Candidates must be able to:

- identify the four basic principles, how they are ordered and why they are ordered
- demonstrate awareness of the ethical decision making process and recognize what constitutes an ethical dilemma
- demonstrate an awareness of the types of issues most likely to occur within his/her practice setting
- demonstrate awareness of an ethical decision making process and apply this to a real or hypothetical dilemma from his/her practice
- explain what is meant by limits of competence and provide an example of a limit that applies with respect to him/her
- provide a summary of his/her practice and identify his/her knowledge of theory and best practice in each of the core competency areas.
- Identify what access they have to other psychologists for the purposes of workplace consultation.
- Identify legislation relevant to his/her area of practice.

APPLICATION OF THE CODE OF ETHICS:

In addition to knowing the four principles, the candidate should be able to:

- Articulate that all four principles are taken into account and balanced in ethical decision making. He/she should also be aware that the principles are ordered according to the weight each generally should be given when they conflict but that the complexity of ethical conflicts precludes a firm ordering of principles.
- Provide a real or hypothetical dilemma from his/her practice and clearly articulate which principles were in conflict and why; how they balanced the four principles and; the basis for his/her chosen decision. While it is not necessary to identify the steps in the ethical decision making process by name, he/she should give evidence of an understanding of all aspects of the process.
- List two or more areas within his/her practice where ethical dilemmas are possible and state what form of proactive decision-making might help prevent problems in the two areas identified.

LIMITS OF COMPETENCE:

A candidate should be able to:

- Describe in his/her own words what is meant by the phrase “*limits of competence*”.
- Define his/her limits of competence including populations served.
- Give an example from his/her area of practice that demonstrates awareness of a competence boundary.

KNOWLEDGE OF BEST PRACTICE AND THEORY IN THE CORE COMPETENCY AREAS:

In addition to knowledge of the Code and the ethical decision making process as it applies to a candidate’s setting they should also be able to describe his/her practice as it relates to each of the other Core Competency areas.

This would include:

- knowledge of the standard assessment approaches and tools for his/her area
- an understanding of how scientific method is used in the assessment process
- knowledge of standard interventions used in his/her area
- ability to describe the report writing process
- ability to identify some of the key research questions being explored in his/her area
- awareness of the importance of boundary issue and the ability to provide an example of a boundary crossing

July 2007

NSBEP NOTES ~ ETHICAL ISSUES VERSUS ETHICAL DILEMMAS ~

In the NSBEP's oral exam, we ask candidates to describe an ethical dilemma. It has been our experience that most candidates are well prepared for this aspect of the oral exam. Of course, we see some candidates who struggle with their ethical dilemma, and when there is a struggle, it is most often with regard to perceiving a dilemma when none exists.

Although it may seem like a matter of semantics, the distinction between an ethical issue and an ethical dilemma is an important one, and has significant implications for practice. As psychologists, we face an enormous diversity of situations in which we must call upon our knowledge of the Code of Ethics. Ethical situations can be expected to arise as a matter of routine in our practice, and the great majority of them are fairly straightforward; we can usually make correct decisions easily and quickly, because the "right" answer is clear.

An ethical situation presents what I will call an ethical "issue" when it is possible to ascertain the answer by simply adhering to a clear-cut guideline in the Code of Ethics. As an example, a psychologist who is asked by her hairstylist if she can take him on as a client can easily and readily come to the conclusion that the answer must be "no," in adherence with the standard of avoiding dual relationships (Principle III: Integrity in Relationships). The ethical decision-making process for an ethical issue such as this should occur quickly, leading to an easy resolution, since there is no conflict between principles.

Typically, an ethical dilemma, on the other hand, exists when two or more ethical principles or standards are conflicting with each other. The situation above would become an ethical dilemma if, for example, the psychologist lives in a remote area, and is the only psychologist available. In such a case, another principle becomes relevant, namely Principle II: Responsible Caring. This principle is now competing with the psychologist's need to avoid the dual relationship. Because Principle II "trumps" Principle III, in accordance with the hierarchy of the principles, the psychologist must find a way to *manage* the dual relationship, rather than avoid it. Perhaps, for example, the psychologist will need to take on her hairstylist as a client and find a new hairstylist, to ensure that the best interests of the hairstylist-client are protected.

To perceive an ethical "dilemma" when the issue is clear-cut and there is no conflict between principles is neither correct nor efficient in practice. In the case of such a misperception, an easily-resolved ethical situation can instead become needlessly complicated, and moreover, it can lead to the possibility of the psychologist acting unethically. In the above example, if the psychologist perceives the simple ethical issue as a dilemma, she may, for example, perceive that she has an obligation to provide treatment to her hairstylist when she does not. Perhaps, to complicate matters, her hairstylist has indicated that he feels comfortable with her, and has heard her talk about the type of therapy she conducts, and he sees her as the only psychologist he would ever trust. Even so, no ethical dilemma exists, as the psychologist must still avoid the dual relationship, despite the hairstylist's wishes. Even though the psychologist may *feel* conflicted, or experience a *personal* dilemma about a situation, a true ethical dilemma does not exist, as there is conflict between principles.

Of course, I've presented but one of an infinite number of possible ethical issues and dilemmas

psychologists may face, but I hope that it exemplifies the importance of being proficient at distinguishing between an ethical issue and an ethical dilemma.

Nancy Bartlett, Ph.D.
Psychologist
Board Chair

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