

An Ounce of Prevention *Confidentiality, Ethical Issues, Liability, & Insurance*

When you go out to your CASL placement, you assume many responsibilities. Your Community Partner provides real services to real people with real needs, and as a member of your Community Partner's staff, you're part of their team. They and the people they serve count on you to do your share to the best of your ability and in a responsible, professional fashion.

In order to prepare you to live up to these expectations and to do a good job for your Community Partner and the people they serve, you first need to know the basics about four critical issues: confidentiality, professional ethics, liability and insurance.

Confidentiality

Professionals in law, medicine, social work, psychology (counseling) and certain other fields are obligated to maintain confidentiality between themselves and their clients or patients. Whatever they learn from or about their patients or clients in privileged information and cannot be revealed to others without permission from the client or patient. Be aware that as a service-learner in these situations, you may share in this privileged information. You may learn information about clients or patients which is covered by these rules of confidentiality. Speak to your supervisor to discuss how the obligations of confidentiality may apply to you. Do not reveal or discuss information about clients or patients without permission of the professionals for whom you are working.

Observing Unethical or Illegal Conduct

You may see contraband or you may be told of something that is legally or morally questionable. What do you do? Especially in light of the confidentiality rules just mentioned, this is a particularly difficult issue. How do you balance the need to report a crime or unethical behavior against maintaining confidentiality or jeopardizing an individual's safety? Such dilemmas raise serious ethical questions where you may feel you have conflicting duties. What to do?

The possible circumstances are much too varied to be covered by these guidelines. The one rule you should always follow is don't try to resolve the problem alone. Consult with a supervisor or other professional to whom you are responsible. These situations will not be new to the professionals with whom you are working (and whose reputation and livelihood may be at stake if they are responsible for you). They have dealt with similar situations before and have wisdom in dealing with these situations.

Liability

If an accident should occur, the law and the courts decide who will be financially responsible. If you are involved in an accident and sustain an injury, or if you cause an injury while participating in a Service-Learning course, then you, the Community Partner, and MSU are possible candidates for claims for financial responsibility.

The only perfect protection is prevention. Pay attention to the Integrated Service-Learning Handbook. It will give you important insights on Community Partner protocol. Try to avoid accidents and injuries. Ask first. If you have any doubts about the wisdom of doing something, consult your supervisor or other professionals employed by your Community Partner.

- **Health Insurance** – The option of participating in a health insurance program while at MSU exists. Contact the Taylor Health & Wellness Center at 836-4000 for additional information.
- **Liability Insurance** – For some Service-Learning placements, particularly in the medical community, you may be required to purchase your own liability insurance. Consult with your instructor and/or CASL staff.

These warnings should not deter you. They are provided to emphasize the importance of your service-learning experience. Service-learners do real work for real people with real needs. Remember the rule: When in doubt, ask!

I, _____, have read "An Ounce of Prevention," and the Integrated Service-Learning Handbook on _____, 20_____. I understand that the CASL office and my instructor will be able to answer any questions I have regarding confidentiality, professional ethics, liability, and insurance.

Course

Student's Signature and Date