



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

Ethics in Research and Professional Practice

Board of Ethics

Note: The present analysis and instructions concerning professional practice and research are provided as guidelines based on the specific language in the current Code of Ethics. The Board of Ethics is evaluating the proposal to add a principle and/or other modifications to the Code to enhance specific references to ethics in research and scholarship.

Issues in Ethics Statements: Definition

From time to time, the Board of Ethics determines that members and certificate holders can benefit from additional analysis and instruction concerning a specific issue of ethical conduct. Issues in Ethics statements are intended to heighten sensitivity and increase awareness. They are illustrative of the Code of Ethics and intended to promote thoughtful consideration of ethical issues. They may assist members and certificate holders in engaging in self-guided ethical decision-making. These statements do not absolutely prohibit or require specified activity. While facts and circumstances surrounding a matter of concern will determine whether the activity is ethical, the basic premise of honesty is bedrock: honesty with clients, honesty in diagnosis/prognoses, honesty in billing, honesty in written work and in enforcing ethical guidelines. This Issues in Ethics statement replaces the previous one of the same title.

Reference this material as: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2002). Ethics in research and professional practice. *ASHA Supplement 22*, in press.

Index terms: Ethics (professional practice issues), legal and ethical research issues, research methods

Document type: Ethics and related documents

Introduction

The Code of Ethics of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association was adopted to ensure that speech-language pathologists and audiologists would discharge their professional responsibilities in a manner that reflects and preserves the highest possible standards of integrity and ethical principles.

Most speech-language pathologists and audiologists who are members of ASHA or who hold the Certificate of Clinical Competence from the Association are engaged primarily in clinical service or in clinical education of students. It is indeed appropriate, therefore, that a code of ethics address matters of professional propriety that pertain to all aspects of clinical education and service. The Association also has a scholarly mission, however, which is reflected in its journals and its national Convention. Does the Code of Ethics of ASHA include sufficient reference to ethics in research and scholarship?

The present code contains four specific references to ethics in research. One concerns protection of rights and the welfare of human subjects. Principle of Ethics I, Rule N states:

Individuals shall use persons in research or as subjects of teaching demonstrations only with their informed consent.

Two of the references to research relate to the ethics of public statements about research results. Principle of Ethics III, Rule F, and Principle of Ethics IV, Rule F state:

Individuals' statements to the public—advertising, announcing, and marketing their professional services, reporting research results, and promoting products—shall adhere to prevailing professional standards and shall not contain misrepresentations.

Individuals' statements to colleagues about professional services, research results, and

products shall adhere to prevailing professional standards and shall contain no misrepresentations.

The fourth reference to ethics in research involves publications. Principle of Ethics IV, Rule D states:

Individuals shall assign credit only to those who have contributed to a publication, presentation, or product. Credit shall be assigned in proportion to the contribution and only with the contributor's consent.

Discussion

On the surface, the Code may not appear to give extensive attention to ethics in research and scholarship, particularly when those four brief statements are compared with the detailed statements that deal with ethics in clinical practice, or with the lengthy treatises on ethics contained in other associations' codes of ethics. In point of fact, however, all such codes, like ASHA's, focus primarily on protection of the rights and welfare of human and animal subjects.

ASHA's Board of Ethics interprets Principle of Ethics I, Rule N quite broadly. The Board of Ethics believes that the research investigator has the ethical responsibility to protect the rights and welfare of human and animal subjects; to inform all participants in research or persons who act *in loco parentis* of the relevant features of the research to the extent that such information could conceivably influence the decision of the subject to participate; to respect the subject's freedom to decline to participate or to withdraw from participation in the research without penalty, real or implied; to protect the confidentiality of the participant in research; and to evaluate carefully the ethical acceptability of all aspects of the proposed investigation. In short, the rights and welfare of subjects in research must be held paramount, and we believe that the Code addresses concern for research subjects adequately.

Ethical responsibilities are also associated with other participants in research, and the Code may not appear to be sufficiently clear on this matter. Principles of Ethics III and IV refer to individuals' "responsibilities to the public" and "to the professions and their relationships with colleagues, students, and members of allied professions." With respect to research, the Board of Ethics interprets those principles to mean that

the investigator must assume responsibility for ethical treatment of all collaborators, assistants, students, and employees; that parallel obligations toward the investigator fall on the collaborators, assistants, students, and employees; and that ethical treatment includes appropriate authorship,¹ citation, and acknowledgment in all publications, reports, and presentations.

The Code contains no explicit reference to *honesty* in the conduct and reporting of research, even though matters of honesty surely must be the capstone of a code of ethics. However, the Board of Ethics believes that matters of honesty fall within the scope and intent of Principle of Ethics III, Rule F and Principle of Ethics IV, Rule F. The Board of Ethics interprets those rules to mean that the investigator and the investigator's collaborators, assistants, students, and employees have an ethical responsibility to preserve and maintain total honesty in all facets of an investigation and in the reporting of results of that investigation. Plagiarism, falsification, misrepresentation, fabrication, and other forms of dishonesty in scientific inquiry and scientific reporting must be avoided assiduously, and any and all instances of fraud and fakery in research and scholarship will be considered violations of the Code of Ethics.

The actions of most scientific investigators and writers in universities or research establishments are covered by statements about plagiarism that apply to all faculty or employees of the institution although they may be embedded in a general misconduct statement. Although those individuals involved in other aspects of professional practice such as clinical work may not have their actions guided by such documents, they also need to be aware of practical issues in these areas that could affect them ethically and perhaps legally. Failing to carefully consider one's conduct in reproducing the work of another could lead to a breach of a code of ethics and, perhaps, legal action. Appropriate attribution in workshop presentations and correct citations, even in handouts and slides in a professional presentation, will prevent the appearance of plagiarism or its actual fact.

Technology has created new plagiarism dilemmas. Copyright law is still being formulated and interpreted. Online copyrighted materials must be respected. The courts have not been consistent in guidelines for the "fair use" of materials, which may create some uncertainty. Most experts recommend always obtaining written consent before using an original work of any kind (Diotalevi, 1999).

Such things as software piracy, the expanding use of email, the development of intellectual property law, the ease of reproduction and distribution, and the con-

¹The interested reader is referred to a most informative article on the complex issue of appropriate authorship (Spiegel & Keith-Spiegel, 1980).

tinued development of copyright law all speak to the necessity of keeping up with the changes in this legal arena. It is obvious that ethical issues and dilemmas will arise that are unthought of today. The use of technology cannot excuse poor conduct.

Although we think it is proper that a code of ethics address matters of ethics in professional practice and in research to ensure that the highest standards of integrity and ethical principles are preserved, our concern lies equally with enforcement of ethical behavior and with teaching of ethical principles. Understanding ethical canons is the joint responsibility of the individual and of our educational institutions. It may unfortunately be true that issues in ethics no longer occupy the same status in curricula that they enjoyed in the Greek academies and in the medieval and Renaissance universities, but principles of ethics can and must be taught with the very same rigor that we would use to teach scientific method. The Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences (1980) has identified these goals in the teaching of ethics: stimulating the moral imagination, recognizing the moral imagination, recognizing ethical issues, developing analytical skills, eliciting a sense of moral responsibility, and tolerating—and resisting—disagreement and ambiguity. Although those goals can certainly be met by established curricula in, for example, philosophy of science centers, they also deserve to be incorporated into the curricula of educational programs in the speech, language, and hearing sciences.

Four citations from the Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences report (1980, p. 4) seem particularly useful for highlighting some of what students must learn to appreciate.

Students should learn to examine and make distinctions among large concepts such as justice, dignity, privacy, virtue, right, and good and ethical principles and moral values.

Students should consider what it means to take ethics seriously. Do individuals have freedom to make moral choices? What is the connection between thinking about ethics and personal conduct?

Students should learn that even if ethical certainty is often impossible, ethical reasoning about choices can be precise....

Students should learn to seek exact points of difference, attempting to solve disagreements as much as possible by resisting false distinctions and evasions (p. 4).

We trust that the teaching of ethics is not being entirely neglected. In our view, the teaching of science and of ethics in science cannot truly be separated, and it is appropriate that a code of ethics serve as a firm reminder of their unity.

References

- Diotalevi, R. N. (1999, January). Copyrighting cyberspace: Unweaving a tangled Web. *Syllabus*, 12, 44–48.
- Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences. (1980, Spring/Summer). Applied ethics: A strategy for fostering professional responsibility. *Carnegie Quarterly*, 28, 1–7.
- Spiegel, O., & Keith-Spiegel, P. (1970). Assignment of publication credits: Ethics and practices of psychologists. *American Psychologist*, 25, 738–747.

1982; revised 2001.