

## CASE STUDY RESPONSE

### Data can be used with safeguards

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The author of the case study (1) has highlighted a dilemma that confronts many counsellors. Should case documentations in an area such as domestic violence be used for research?

In my opinion keeping case documentations out of the purview of research will prevent us from understanding the situation in its entirety, and putting it in context.

Is the role of a counsellor to be equated with that of a priest in a confessional? Should the same rules that govern confession in church be available for a client in a counselling session? In an ideal situation, yes. The counsellor is duty-bound to keep the client's disclosures in a counselling session confidential. However in actuality the counsellor wears many other hats apart from that of a counsellor. Often the counsellor is an academic or a researcher. The case data obtained in a counselling situation can be used – and is often used – to illustrate an issue being discussed in a classroom. Such examples serve to exemplify the case, driving the message home.

If case data were never to be used for research, theory and knowledge building would not take place. To illustrate, students

of psychoanalysis use the case study of Little Hans to understand the Oedipal conflict and the issues therein. If Freud had not used case data to generate theory, the knowledge base of psychology would be much poorer. Our understanding of the development of the human psyche has depended on researchers who were not squeamish about using case data.

But once one accepts that case data can be used for research, researchers must be duty bound to observe an essential principle of research: to do no harm. Ethical considerations of the use of the research data should be observed. Cases can be summed up in the form of vignettes which excerpt salient events from the data while painting a full and rich description of the event. One rudimentary step, to be followed by researchers, is the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of case subjects. Such vignettes can be used to great effect for research or to illustrate an issue in discussion or analysis.

#### **Reference**

1. Deosthali P. Can case documentations be used for research? *Ind J Med Ethics* 2005; 2; 129.

#### **Bioethics Link**

Bioethics Link, the quarterly newsletter of the Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture, Karachi, Pakistan, is now available online. The latest issue, August 2005, contains an activity report on the CBEC, and articles on the National Academy of Sciences guidelines for human embryonic stem cell research, Islamic perspectives on abortion, and an international overview of legal aspects of abortion. The articles in this and the previous issue are available at <http://www.siut.org/bioethics/bioethicslinksvol1issue2.pdf>

To look at the previous issue, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2005, please go to <http://www.siut.org/bioethics/bioethicslinksvol1issue1.pdf>