ALPS - Assessment and Learning in Practice Settings

Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

Critically evaluating ethical practice in health and social care (CEEP)

A content analysis of professional codes of conduct

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The team

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Introduction

- **Stage 1** - Content analysis = discrete component of a larger study.

- First step in a bid to answer a research question.

- Research question for this component is:

- *What constitutes ethical practice?*

Methodology

- **Content analysis** is a method '*used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense making effort that takes a volume of material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings' (*Patton 2002 p453).

- Codes of conduct/ethics from health and social care professions reviewed (**N=16**) to determine content, this has not been undertaken before.

- International comparison of psychology codes of ethics with the American Psychological Association **(N=24)** (Leach 1997).

Content categories

- – ●formed following review of each code.

- – ● inclusion determined by similar content.

- – ● excluded profession specific data, appendices.

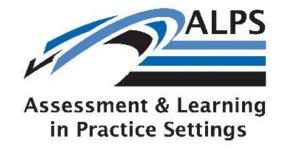- – ● categories distilled into themes (inter-rater agreement determined).

Findings

- **General comments**
- Varied in length (range =4-27).
- Variety in emphasis.
- 'You must' and 'you should'.
- Designed to protect the public and the professional.
- BASW Code of Ethics provides a different perspective.
- Additional publications

Similarities

- All state an aim.
- No definition of ethical practice.
- Ethical practice occurs in 11 codes
- Examples of unethical practice.
- Similar content and language.
- Combination of regulations, ethical principles and etiquette.

Findings

- 51 categories distilled into 7 themes.

- **Law** e.g. duty of care
- **Professionalism** e.g accountability for practice
- **Ethical practice issues** e.g unnecessary interventions, gifts
- **Ethical principles** e.g respect autonomy
- **Values** e.g trustworthy (smallest theme n= 2)
- **Roles** e.g. supervision
- **Professional duties/obligations** e.g keeping and maintaining accurate records. (largest theme n=29)

Discussion

- A broad universal definition of ethical practice may emerge but could be difficult.
- Professions encounter different ethical dilemmas
- Ethical dimension to most aspects of health and social care but this is not always recognised.
- Codes do not profess to have all the answers
- Duty ethics vs. virtue approach.
- Practitioners need to use their **professional judgement** when considering conflicting/competing demands and codes allow for this.

Summary

- Codes provide a framework for guidance for practitioners to refer to

- Are similar in content and structure

- Has informed the research question but not answered it

- Proceed to stage 2 – literature review

References

- Leach M M & Harbin J J (1997) Psychological Ethics Codes: A Comparison of Twenty-four Countries. International Journal of Psychology 32 (3) 181-192

- Patton M Q (2002) Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods 3rd Edition Sage Publications London

- www.alps-cetl.ac.uk