STRATEGIES FOR WORK WITH

INVOLUNTARY CLIENTS

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To Glenda and Chris:
Now I can take out the trash.

Figures

Preface

This book is about practice with involuntary clients. Involuntary clients include both those clients required to see a helping practitioner (such as juveniles on probation) and those pressured to "seek help" (such as the alcoholic threatened with desertion by his spouse if he or she does not get help). The book is also about "involuntary practitioners" who may be as reluctant to work with involuntary clients as those clients are to work with them.

When I entered graduate school, I intended to work with clients who wanted to work with me, who would be thankful for the insights I gave them, and who would pay my receptionist on the way out. The reality was that my clients then and later were often more interested in escaping the clutches of my agency and the law than in gaining an insight into their personalities.

Most of the intervention theory I was taught ignored these clients or considered them the exception to the rule of work with voluntary clients. When I became an instructor, I continued the tradition of teaching voluntary client methods to students who worked with involuntary clients. Independent-thinking students would ask, "But how does this apply to the people who don't want to see you?" and I would improvise answers adapting voluntary methods. This book is written in answer to those students and practitioners working with involuntary clients who find

difficulty applying voluntary practice theories to involuntary practice. I suggest that involuntary clients are the rule in practice rather than the exception.

The book is written for students, instructors, and practitioners. While probably few students enter the helping professions hoping to work with people who don't want to work with them, many experience less than voluntary client contact through their field placement and internship experiences. Students should find the book useful in explaining and guiding involuntary practice on its own terms. Such practice often appears to be undertaken as a rite of passage to provide experience and toughness before graduating to work with voluntary clients. Students may also find parallels to their own situations as "involuntary" students: if they wish to graduate, they must take some required courses "for their own good" in addition to choices in elective courses.

The book is also intended for practice methods instructors who want to add material about involuntary contact to balance sources which only assume voluntary contact. Instructors teaching courses about social problems and practice settings that often include involuntary clients (such as child welfare, criminal justice, chemical abuse programs) should also find the book a useful practice supplement.

Finally, the book is written for the practitioners who work with involuntary clients. While the book is based in the social work profession, the content should be useful to other helping practitioners such as psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, probation officers, and youth workers. The book addresses public-agency practitioners with legal mandates, large caseloads, feelings of being unappreciated, overworked, and underpaid, as well as private-agency practitioners who may not recognize that they are in fact working with involuntary clients.

The book is designed to help both the involuntary practitioner and the involuntary client become at least semi-voluntary. Guidelines are aimed at providing legal, ethical, and effective intervention. While involuntary clients differ from one another as much as they do from voluntary clients, involuntary clients share the fact that they did not *willingly* enter contact with the practitioner. Consequently, the book focuses most extensively on the socialization and contracting phase which involuntary clients have most in common. Guidelines for interventions after the contracting phase are more tentative, since there may be much variation according to specific problem and setting. The book will help practitioners prepare for involuntary contacts by providing them with realistic role expectations so that they can make clearer decisions about when they must act and when they should not act. The guidelines should lead to

less hostile and uncooperative encounters, to more successful contracts, and less "burnout" on both sides of the involuntary transaction.

Finally, the book will review the philosophical debate about the conflict between social control and caring roles, and between rehabilitation and criminal justice goals. The issues are reviewed with an aim toward increasing awareness without proposing to resolve those issues herein. The book is designed to help practitioners now amid the ongoing debate.

Involuntary clients sometimes have fantasies that their practitioners will leave them alone, or forget about "helping" them. Practitioners also fantasize that they can make involuntary clients change if they can just find the right magic to make those clients think differently, or if they could exert enough force. This book will supply neither that magic nor that force. It will not provide the practitioner with a blueprint for making involuntary clients do what they don't want to do, continue to do it after intervention, and like it. The book will not provide a "laying on of hands" whereby the involuntary client is transformed into a "born again" voluntary client, thankful for insight and eager to modify his or her life patterns. It is not a manual for brainwashing or hypnotizing involuntary clients to bring them to their senses—or the practitioner's point of view. Nor will the guidelines eliminate the need for professional judgment in making decisions.

Guidelines are based on available evidence about interventions which can be used legally, ethically, and effectively across involuntary settings and populations. Where that evidence is limited or inconclusive, alternatives are presented to help practitioners make informed choices. The book also draws on the practice literature from different involuntary populations and helping professions and on my case experiences and those of my students. Practice guidelines are frequently illustrated with selections from transcriptions derived from training videotapes, some of which were conducted with actual clients. In all cases, pracititioners and clients provided informed consent and client identities are disguised. The book raises questions for further study and suggests ways that those questions can be tested.

The book is aimed at increasing understanding of the involuntary transaction and knowing how to act within it. As practitioners need to be able to explain to themselves and others why they carry out an intervention, part I provides a foundation with a conceptual framework for understanding the involuntary transaction and influencing client behavior and attitudes in a legal, ethical, and effective fashion. It draws widely from sources in law, ethics, intervention effectiveness across help-

ing professions and problem areas, and social psychology. Chapters are organized around brief summaries of relevant literature and organizing principles. Case examples are used to clarify those principles. Many figures are provided to serve as a reminder of key points.

Those practitioners currently dealing with involuntary clients who are impatient with theory may choose to skip ahead to part II. Those who feel involuntary about their own practice may wish to begin with chapter 14. Part II offers practice strategies with specific guidelines for legal, ethical, and effective work with involuntary clients. Chapter 8 details socialization methods while chapter 9 describes contracting processes and chapter 10 illustrates techniques for formalizing the contract. Chapter 11 provides guidelines for middle-phase intervention and termination. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 are strongly influenced by the task-centered approach. While the task-centered approach is not the only voluntary practice model compatible with the concepts, theory, and empirical evidence reported in part I, it is well suited to such work because of the value placed on collaboration with clients, self-determination, specificity of treatment activities, and empirical base of the approach. Chapter 12 presents an adaptation to work with families and chapter 13 adapts involuntary practice to work with groups. Finally, chapter 14 describes the involuntary practitioner and the system, and presents guidelines for practitioner action to reduce burnout and provide more legal, ethical, and effective practice throughout the system.

Contents

A Foundation for Work with Involuntary Clients

Practice with involuntary clients has been largely guided by voluntary models. Practitioners need to know when and why to act with involuntary clients as well as how. Part I will lay a foundation for legal, ethical, and effective practice with involuntary clients by providing concepts and empirical data. Chapter 1 introduces the issue of involuntary practice for helping professionals. Chapter 2 describes an involuntary client continuum and describes pressures in the involuntary transaction on practitioners and clients. Chapter 3 reviews the legal base for involuntary practice, focusing on issues of informed consent, due process, right to treatment and freedom from unnecessary treatment. Chapter 4 continues to build a base of ethical practice by reviewing self-determination and circumstances under which it can be ethically limited and includes guidance for appropriate use of paternalism. Intervention principles based on evidence of effectiveness are presented in chapter 5 and principles of behavior and attitude change are presented in chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents deviance, resistance, reactance, power relations, and self-presentation strategies as five frameworks for helping explain what occurs in involuntary transactions.