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STATE OF WISCONSIN
BEFORE THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST SECTION
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY, PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING
AND SOCIAL WORK EXAMINING BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF THE DISCIPLINARY	:	
PROCEEDINGS AGAINST	:	
	:	FINAL DECISION AND ORDER
PATRICIA K. CONNORS, L.M.F.T.,	:	LS# 0508014MFT
RESPONDENT.	:	

[Division of Enforcement Case # 02 MFT 004]

The parties to this action for the purposes of Wis. Stat. § 227.53 are:

Patricia K. Connors, L.M.F.T.
615 S. 8th Street
Sheboygan, WI 53081

Division of Enforcement
Department of Regulation and Licensing
1400 East Washington Avenue
PO Box 8935
Madison, WI 53708-8935

Marriage and Family Therapist Section
Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling
and Social Work Examining Board
Department of Regulation and Licensing
1400 East Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 8935
Madison, WI 53708-8935

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The parties in this matter agree to the terms and conditions of the attached Stipulation as the final decision of this matter subject to the approval of the Marriage and Family Therapist Section. The Section has reviewed this Stipulation and considers it acceptable.

Accordingly, the Section in this matter adopts the attached Stipulation and makes the following:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Patricia K. Connors, L.M.F.T., Respondent, date of birth July 16, 1948, is licensed by the Marriage and Family Therapist Section as a marriage and family therapist in the state of Wisconsin pursuant to license number 12, which was first granted August 2, 1993. (Prior to a statutory change effective November 1, 2002, Respondent's credential was a certificate as a marriage and family therapist.)

2. Respondent was granted her credential pursuant to the grandparenting provisions of 1991 Act 160, §21(2)(e). Respondent received a master of arts degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 1983.

3. Respondent's last address reported to the Department of Regulation and Licensing is 615 S. 8th Street, Sheboygan, WI 53081.

4. During the following events and to the present, Respondent has practiced as a marriage and family therapist at the Northshore Clinic of Sheboygan, Inc. (Clinic).

5. Respondent first provided professional services to Ms. A during an intake session on February 2, 2001. Therapy continued until Ms. A terminated it on September 11, 2001.

a. The initial diagnosis was major depressive disorder, single episode, severe, without psychotic features. [On March 6, 2001, an Axis II diagnosis of mixed personality disorder with obsessive-compulsive and borderline features was added.]

b. The initial treatment plan was for individual therapy on a weekly basis, with the goal to reduce depressive symptoms through a combination of medical management and therapy.

c. On March 2, 2001, an emergency session was held because Ms. A expressed suicidal ideation. Ms. A rejected hospitalization, psychiatric consultation and additional therapy sessions with Respondent. The following day, Mr. A, Ms. A's husband, called Respondent and said Ms. A would attend a session with Respondent. That session was held on March 4, 2001.

d. Weekly sessions continued and on April 6, 2001, Mr. A, who was concerned by his wife's suicidal ideation, called Respondent. Respondent called Ms. A, who said all promises of not harming herself were off. When Ms. A refused to come in for a session, Respondent provided Mr. A with his options if Ms. A would not contract for safety. Respondent contacted her psychiatric supervisor for consultation and was able to convince Ms. A to agree to contract for safety and a session the following day.

e. From April 9, 2001 to June 25, 2001, Respondent saw Ms. A 12 times. Ms. A was struggling with family issues and overwhelmed with sadness, but had no suicidal crisis. A medication change caused an improvement in Ms. A's mood and functioning.

f. No sessions occurred from June 26, 2001 to July 9, 2001, while Respondent was on vacation. Three sessions occurred in July and after another three weeks without sessions, Ms. A returned for sessions on August 16 and 27, 2001.

g. Ms. A then sent Respondent a 4 page letter indicating why she desired to terminate therapy and psychotropic medications. A termination session was held on September 11, 2001. Respondent had consulted with her supervising psychologist and at his suggestion at that session, provided Ms. A with a written statement of the risks of termination and three therapy resources if Ms. A chose to continue with mental health services in the future.

6. The supervising psychologist had also instructed that Respondent not resume treatment of Ms. A without negotiating a detailed structuring treatment plan with Ms. A which included an agreement to comply with medications ordered by her psychiatrist. A few weeks after terminating treatment, Ms. A scheduled an appointment with Respondent and on October 9, 2001, they began treatment again.

a. On October 9, 2001, Respondent met with Ms. A, who said she had been doing poorly since discontinuing her medications and wished to resume treatment. No written specific treatment plan was created as the supervising psychologist had instructed. Ms. A provided Respondent with a list of her goals, which a mental health provider would not consider treatment goals. Respondent placed Ms. A's goals in the chart and labeled it as Ms. A's "identified treatment goals."

b. From October 16, 2001 through February 14, 2002, they had 16 sessions. Ms. A then became more depressed following a family crisis and was seen four more times in February.

c. They had 5 sessions between March 5 and March 18, 2002 as Ms. A described being more suicidal. Ms. A's psychiatrist felt Ms. A was more manipulative than suicidal. Respondent recommended that Ms. A agree to inpatient hospitalization. After much resistance, on March 18, 2002, Ms. A finally agreed to in-patient hospitalization on March 23, 2002 when her school's spring break occurred. Ms. A signed a contract that she would not commit suicide before the hospitalization.

d. Respondent's colleagues became concerned with the lack of progress in Ms. A's treatment; Ms. A's fragile status after 43 sessions. The supervising psychologist was also concerned that Respondent was becoming too involved with Ms. A and her issues. As an example, rather than involving the family, Respondent had driven Ms. A home after sessions in which Ms. A would not agree to refrain from self harm.

e. On March 19, 2002, Respondent, the supervising psychologist, Ms. A's psychiatrist and another therapist met for a peer review discussion of Ms. A's case. The following treatment plan resulted from that peer discussion:

- 1) Ms. A needed to enter inpatient treatment as planned.
- 2) Respondent could no longer provide treatment.
- 3) Successful treatment by another member of the Clinic was unlikely.
- 4) The plan for transfer to a different therapist should be developed while Ms. A was an inpatient.
- 5) Respondent was to have one terminating session with Ms. A while she was an inpatient.

7. On March 20, 2002, following the peer review discussion and before Ms. A's scheduled inpatient

hospitalization, several events took place which caused Respondent to consult with the supervising psychologist. Together they drafted a letter to Ms. A, which was reviewed by the other therapist who participated in the peer review and was then delivered to Ms. A by messenger at 5:30 p.m. that evening. The letter mentioned the events and said:

- a. Respondent had discussed Ms. A's care with 3 supervisors the previous day because of "the recent intensity and difficulty in the clinical management of your case."
- b. The combined judgment was that outpatient care was no longer adequate and they all strongly encouraged her to follow through on the planned admission.
- c. Mr. A had said Ms. A felt coerced into signing the "no-suicide contract" on March 18, 2002, which implied she no longer considered it valid. Ms. A had called and left a message that she was canceling her March 21 appointment with Respondent and was not rescheduling.
- d. Because of these events, Respondent and the Clinic could no longer assume responsibility for her care. Respondent directed Ms. A to the list of referrals provided at the time of the September 11, 2001 termination and offered to facilitate a referral elsewhere.

8. The evening of March 20, 2002, Ms. A went to the Clinic, waited until after Respondent's last session and asked to discuss the letter. Respondent related the peer review discussions and told Ms. A that Respondent had become too close to the situation and could not be objective in providing her care. Ms. A said she would be admitted as planned and Respondent said she would assist in the transition to the new therapist.

9. Respondent's supervisors had stressed the need for a clean break with Ms. A and had specified that she have only one termination session. Prior to sending the letter, it was recommended that it take place during the hospitalization. Instead, it had occurred when Ms. A came to the Clinic the evening of March 20, 2002. The following occurred:

- a. On March 21, 2002, Respondent called Mr. A, who told her Ms. A was feeling abandoned by her.
- b. On March 24, 2002, Respondent met with Ms. A at the hospital in Milwaukee, during visiting hours signing in as a friend.
- c. On March 25, 2002, Respondent took a call from Ms. A, who questioned what was happening at the hospital. Respondent encouraged her to talk to her case manager there.
- d. On March 26, 2002, Respondent received a call from Ms. A's hospital case worker confirming that Respondent would not be providing follow up care and seeking a recommendation for another therapist. Respondent recommended a male therapist as the peer review group had suggested.
- e. On March 27, 2002, Respondent received another call from Ms. A's hospital case worker who said that Ms. A insisted on another session with Respondent to discuss why she would not continue providing treatment. Respondent said that had already happened but the case worker insisted there be another appointment and would not allow it to take place at the hospital. Respondent said she would have to consult with her supervisor and tentatively agreed to an appointment to be held April 3, 2002. The case worker also said that Ms. A had refused to see a male therapist and Respondent recommended a female therapist.
- f. On March 29, 2002, Respondent met with her supervising psychologist to discuss Ms. A's request for another appointment with Respondent. The psychologist said it was important to set limits with Ms. A and not provide her with false encouragement which she could manipulate. The psychologist instructed Respondent to cancel the appointment and offer to meet one time and only at the hospital.
- g. On March 31, 2002, Respondent met with Ms. A at the hospital during visiting hours signing in as a friend. She told Ms. A that they could not have the session scheduled for April 3, 2002 and again discussed the reasons for termination.
- h. On April 1, 2002, Ms. A was discharged from the hospital. On April 10, 2002, Respondent accompanied Ms. A to the first session with the new therapist at another clinic, without informing her supervising psychologist. The next day, Ms. A sent Respondent a letter telling her she would not continue to see that therapist.

10. Respondent took and completed the following education and training after April 2002:

- a. *Advanced Ethics, Boundaries and the Professional Use of Self*, a four-hour continuing education course sponsored by the Northwest Wisconsin Alliance for Social Worker Continuing Education, on September 14,

2002.

b. *How to Work Effectively With Suicidal Clients*, a six-hour continuing education course sponsored by Health Education Network, on September 20, 2002.

c. During 2002 and 2003, Respondent worked with her then supervising psychologist on countertransference and boundary issues. The psychologist was provided with a copy of Ms. A's lengthy detailed complaint to assist in supervision.

d. *Legal and Ethical Issues in Counseling: A Primer for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Professions*, a six-hour continuing education course sponsored by Cross Country University, on April 4, 2003.

e. *Using Dialectical Behavioral Therapy in Individual Psychotherapy with Challenging Clients*, a six-hour continuing education course sponsored by Columbia St. Mary's-Department of Behavioral Medicine, on October 24, 2003.

f. *The Personality Disorders*, a six-hour continuing education program presented by David Mays, M.D., Ph.D., and sponsored by Behavioral Medicine Center of Waukesha Memorial Hospital, on September 10, 2004.

g. *Ethics and Boundaries in your Practice as a Social Worker*, a four-hour continuing education program sponsored by the Social Work Professional Program, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, on November 13, 2004.

h. *Mental Status & Risk Assessments*, a six-hour continuing education program sponsored by PESI Healthcare, on March 17, 2005.

11. This is the only complaint the Department or the Section has ever received regarding Respondent's practice.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

1. The Marriage and Family Therapist Section of the Wisconsin Marriage and Family Therapy, Professional Counseling and Social Work Examining Board has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 457.26(2) and has authority to enter into this stipulated resolution pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 227.44(5).

2. Respondent's conduct, as set out above, is negligence in practice in more than once instance and a violation Wis. Adm. Code § MPSW 20.02(22) which subjects Respondent to discipline pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 457.26(2)(h).

ORDER

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED:

1. Respondent, Patricia K. Connors, L.M.F.T., is hereby Reprimanded for the above conduct.

2. Within 90 days of the date of this Order, Respondent shall take and complete 6 hours of continuing education on the subject of therapist-client boundaries, which course or courses shall first be approved by the Section, or its designee. Respondent is prohibited from applying these credits toward satisfaction of the continuing education required during the July 1 2005 through June 30, 2007 registration biennium.

3. Respondent shall, within 120 days of the date of this Order, pay to the Department of Regulation and Licensing the costs of this proceeding in the amount of \$525.00 pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 440.22(2).

4. All requests, notifications and payment shall be sent to:

Department Monitor
Department of Regulation and Licensing
Division of Enforcement
1400 East Washington Ave.
P.O. Box 8935
Madison, WI 53708-8935
Fax (608) 266-2264
Telephone (608) 267-3817

5. Violation of any of the terms of this Order may be construed as conduct imperiling public health, safety and welfare and may result in a summary suspension of Respondent's license. The Section in its discretion may in the alternative impose additional conditions and limitations or other additional discipline for a violation of any of the terms of this Order. In the event Respondent fails to pay costs as ordered or fails to comply with the ordered continuing education, Respondent's

license SHALL BE SUSPENDED, without further notice or hearing, until Respondent has complied with the terms of this Order.

6. This Order is effective on the date it is signed.

Marriage and Family Therapist Section
Wisconsin Marriage and Family Therapy,
Professional Counseling and Social Work Examining Board

By: Linda Schwallie
A Member of the Section

August 1, 2005
Date