

MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA (HPCSA)

Board is concerned about administration of psychological tests

The Executive Committee of the Professional Board for Psychology at its Strategic Planning Workshop in June 2004 formulated the following mission statement:

"to strive to provide protection for the public and guidance to the profession, based on transparency, integrity and consultation and to be cognisant of both our unique South African context and international perspectives, through formulating and regulating standards for professional education, training and best practices".

It also set the foundation for a review and resolution of various pending matters including, education, training and areas of specialization. The full Board will have a strategic planning session in November 2004 to consolidate the way forward for the next five years. Registered persons will be informed and consulted thereafter. The Board looks forward to a collaborative relationship with all the stakeholders in order to ensure that psychology plays its role in the development of individuals, organizations and in the promotion of well being.

In terms of section 37 of the Health Professions Act (1974), Act 56 of 1974, the Professional Board for Psychology is the controlling statutory body with the authority to classify and legalise the use of psychological tests and prescribed questionnaires, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psycho-physiological functioning or psycho-pathology.

The Board has noted with great concern the growing inappropriate use of psychometric tests. Furthermore, it appears that the public is uncertain and confused about the use and possible misuse of psychological tests. Various initiatives and institutions have been engaged in the training of test users and the Professional Board has a responsibility towards the public and the industry to inform them about the dangers of the misuse and/or abuse of prescribed questionnaires or tests or prescribed techniques, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psycho-physiological functioning or psycho-pathology. Persons and institutions involved with the development and use of the aforementioned psychometric instruments, could contact the Psychometrics Committee of the Professional Board for further information.

Psychological tests have to be administered, scored, interpreted and reported on by registered persons, who have recognised and appropriate education and training in the field of psychometry. It has come to the attention of the Board that some test distributors, in some cases registered psychologists, provide training to unregistered persons, classifying them as certified users, even using tests not registered with the Professional Board for Psychology.

It is important to note that the Board controls the use of all psychological tests and being certified by a test distributor as a test user, does not exempt anyone from the legal requirements regarding education, training and registration. The Board calls upon the immediate cessation of these unlawful and unethical practices. Given that these practices have been occurring whilst there is legislation and a professional ethical code in place, this notice is in effect immediately. The Board will institute disciplinary procedures against any registered practitioner who trained unregistered persons in the use of psychological tests. The Board will also not hesitate to refer matters relating to the use of psychological tests by unregistered persons to the Public Prosecutor for further action.

Furthermore, the Board is reviewing the list of Psychometric Tests to ensure that only those tests that have gone through the established process of norming and validation for the use within the South African context remain on the list. Psychological tests have a great impact on people's lives, including whether they will get jobs or not, whether they are perceived to be psychologically healthy parents in child custody disputes or mentally ill. In order to comply with the Board's primary mandate, that is, the protection of the public, the Board will strive to ensure that psychological tests are utilised appropriately, efficiently and effectively and within the prescribed legislative framework.

The public is implored to report individuals and/or organizations who may solicit for training in psychological tests, the possible misuse of any psychological test/instrument and the selling of test material to unregistered persons.

The Board resolved at its recent meeting that in view of the inability of the current infrastructure of Council to monitor CPD compliance -

- i. no punitive action be taken against practitioners who did not meet CPD requirements;
- ii. monitoring of CPD compliance by psychologists be temporarily suspended pending the implementation of a fully operational infrastructure for the effective and efficient administration of the CPD system. However, psychologists should be alerted to the fact that continuing education is both an ethical and professional responsibility of practitioners and the temporary suspension of the monitoring of CPD compliance did not absolve them from that responsibility.

Phephela Makgoke

Communications Officer, Health Professions Council of South Africa

Telephone: +27 12 338 9368

email: Phephelam@hpcsa.co.za