

# Outpatient Services Contract

Welcome to Legacy Mental Health Center (LMHC). This document contains important information about LMHC professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that you can discuss them with your therapist at your meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between you and the therapist.

## Psychological Services:

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and patient, and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods used to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things talked about both during your sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. There are no guarantees of what you will experience.

The first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, your therapist will be able to offer you some first impressions of what the work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with the therapist. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about the therapists' procedures, please bring them up for discussion whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, LMHC will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

## Meetings:

The therapist normally conducts an evaluation that can last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, both you and the therapist will decide if they are the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, therapists usually schedule one session (a typical session lasts between 45-55 minutes) on a weekly to biweekly basis at an agreed upon time. Some insurance plans only cover a 45 minute session. Some sessions may be longer or shorter and session frequency may vary. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 48 hours advance notice of cancellation (unless you and the therapist both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control). A late cancel/ no show fee of \$125.00 will be assessed in this circumstance. **If it is possible, your therapist will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment.** At the discretion of LMHC your services may be discontinued due to excessive failed appointments or late cancels.

## Professional Fees:

The hourly fee for service is \$250.00. In addition to weekly appointments, LMHC charges this amount for other professional services you may need. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of the therapist. These fees may not be covered by insurance and will be billed to you directly.

If you become involved in legal proceedings that require therapist participation, you will be expected to pay for the therapist's professional time even if they are called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, LMHC charge's \$400.00 per hour for time spent in depositions, travel, testifying, or being in attendance at court. A half day \$1,600.00 retainer is required 10 working days prior to any scheduled appearance. Cancellations less than 3 business days from the scheduled appearance will incur a \$1,600.00 charge. You will also be expected to reimburse the therapist at a rate of \$300.00 per hour for preparation (eg, court case review, report writing, telephone conversations, record reviews, etc.).

### **Billing and Payments:**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless agreed upon otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, your therapist may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, LMHC has the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information released regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, dates of service, and the amount due.

### **Insurance:**

In order to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. LMHC will provide you with whatever assistance needed to help you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

**You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. LMHC will provide you with whatever information they can based on experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, our office will be willing to call the company on your behalf.**

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize the therapist to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases) are required. This information may become part of the insurance company files and will likely be stored electronically. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, LMHC has no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. A copy of the report submitted to insurance, can be provided to you if you request it.

### **Contacting Your Therapist:**

Therapists are not immediately available by telephone. While they are usually in the office between 9 AM and 5 PM, they will not answer the phone when they are with a patient. They make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, except for weekends and holidays. You can also leave a message with the main office. If you are difficult to reach, please leave times when you will be available. **If you are unable to reach your therapist and feel that you can't wait for a return call, contact your family physician, call 911, or go to the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call.** If a therapist will be unavailable for an extended time, you will be provided with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### **Professional Records:**

The laws and standards for all of the behavioral health professions require that treatment records be kept. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records, or your therapist can prepare a summary for you instead. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, it is recommended that you review them with your therapist so the two of you can discuss the contents. Patients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests and records requests.

**Minors:**

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents/guardians the right to examine your treatment records. It is LMHC policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, your therapist will provide them only with general information about the work between client and therapist, unless there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, the therapist will notify parents/guardians or any other appropriate agency of the concerns. The therapist may also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. If possible, before giving them any information, your therapist will discuss the matter with you and do their best to handle any objections you may have with what they are prepared to discuss with parents/guardians. At the end of your treatment, upon parent/guardian request, the therapist may prepare a summary of your work together, which therapist and client will discuss before it is reviewed with parents/guardians.

**Confidentiality:**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist is protected by law, and can only be released to others with your written permission. There are, however, a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent your therapist from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings, such as those involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order your therapist to testify if he/she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which all mental health professionals are legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if they have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. For example, if a therapist believes that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is being abused, that therapist must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If a therapist believes that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to another, the therapist is required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If a patient threatens to harm himself/herself, the therapist may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely occurred at LMHC. If a similar situation does occur, your therapist will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

Therapists occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, each therapist makes every effort to avoid revealing the identity of the client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at your next meeting. Your therapist will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and no one at LMHC is an attorney.