

Book Review

Israel, Andrew B. *Using the Law: Practical Decision Making in Mental Health*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books, 2010.

Reviewed by Jessica N. Godsey, JD, MCJ

As an attorney who has worked with mental health professionals on a routine basis, it has often been obvious to me that there has been a dissonance between the two professions. Practitioners of both professions struggle, often on a daily basis, with decisions that involve both ethical and legal issues that have cultural and practical considerations. It is rare to find a book that so successfully addresses and explains both the ethics and legal aspects of practical decisions in the mental health field as does *Using the Law: Practical Decision Making in Mental Health*.

The organizational format is simple—most chapters consist of a duty relevant to mental health practitioners. Such duties include practicing in a reasonably competent manner, seeking informed consent, identifying the primary client, treating clients and coworkers with due process and equal protection, and maintaining confidentiality.

Each chapter provides a decision-making framework that focuses on four steps. First, the ethical duty is reviewed. Next, the text discusses the law applicable to that duty. Then, the ethical canons and their take on the duty are noted. Finally, the text uses vignettes to focus on potential and practical considerations.

Ethical decisions are inherently difficult to apply to real-life, culturally-specific case decisions. The author's well organized, unified approach makes this text stand out from others. Furthermore, Israel's use of case vignettes that take into account legal precedent as well as ethical canons highlight the intricacy of these professional issues.

This framework creates a valuable learning tool for students who have not had advance practice experience. The only very slight downside is that, on occasion, these vignettes do seem to become slightly repetitive. This is a result of Israel's use of minute differences in the ethical obligation to elucidate the complexity of such issues, which does in itself have educational value.

Although more experienced service providers may have developed a healthy grasp of their own professional code of ethics, it would be less likely that they have a polished understanding of the applicable laws. Those who consult an attorney in the field may discover that law-specific responses remain a challenge or even a contradiction to the ethical codes. The author's framework in this text is one that can be an equally tantalizing reference for professionals as they make a plan of attack for challenging case decisions. Likewise, supervisors should be excited to have this as a resource to guide others in the mental health field.

Using the Law is easy to read and use, and as such is a valuable learning tool for those students in the mental health field. It also provides a structured approach to mental health decision-making that is an excellent and applicable reference for mental health and legal practitioners. I highly recommend this book for members of both professions.