



Technology and VR: Ethical Considerations #changingtimes

JOHN WALSH: Hello. My name is John Walsh. I'm the project director for the Center for Innovative Training in VR at the George Washington University. Welcome to our webinar entitled Technology and VR: Ethical Considerations, #changingtimes.

As we adjust to utilizing digital technologies in new and innovative ways in our daily work, today we want to explore how we can use these platforms in responsible and ethical ways. We're really fortunate to have a fantastic team of presenters today to explore this topic, including Melissa Diehl, who's the project director of the WINTAC Pre-Employment Transition Services team, Dr. Rob Froehlich, associate professor and project director of the VR Return on Investment project as well as Virginia Career Pathways, and DJ Ralston, senior research associate at Project E3 and at WINTAC.

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The content of today's presentation was developed by our team at the Center for Innovative Training in VR at the George Washington University. And it aligns with our overall mission of developing innovative methods to train VR personnel to support the work of state VR agencies in delivering high-quality services and to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Be sure to check back at our website at trainvr.org for other offerings that we will have in the future.

So at this moment in time, we finally must adapt to how we deliver services. This includes the utilization of distance counseling and the greater use of digital technologies in our work. Using those modalities can present some unique opportunities, as well as challenges, in our work. And in today's webinar, we want to explore some of the ethical considerations when we're using these techniques.

Today we're going to cover updates to our codes in relation to personal virtual relationships, confidentiality, boundaries, netiquette and digital footprints, rules of engagement, and

competence in the use of digital media and social media. So in order to kick off our presentation, I'm now going to turn it over to Dr. Rob Froehlich.

ROB FROEHLICH: Hey. Thanks, John. I want to start our discussion today by saying thanks for making the time for joining us and to give you a little bit of context about the webinar, too. Because this is a recorded webinar and there will not be an opportunity to ask questions live or through a chat box, we want to encourage viewers to reach out to any of the presenters with questions or comments after viewing the webinar. Contact information is provided later on in the webinar.

We have also included PowerPoint slides and a text-only version of this webinar on our website. And we encourage you to please complete the evaluation survey for this webinar, which can be accessed by clicking the evaluation link on the website. If you would like to obtain CRC credits, you will need to complete the evaluation after viewing the webinar. Finally, this webinar is closed captioned. And a transcript will be available upon request.

So what's a good place for us to start talking about the ethical implications of technology on the work that we do? Let's start with looking at the CRC Code. And we're going to chat a whole bunch about the code and apply it to some scenarios today, too.

But the introduction piece to Section J, which is the area of the code dealing specifically with technology and counseling at a distance, acknowledges the fact that rehab counselors recognize that service provision is not just in person or face-to-face interactions. As John mentioned, so many things have happened in the past few months that have required us to move much more to an at-a-distance service delivery model.

So the Code acknowledges and is responsive to that, indicating that counselors actively attempt to understand the evolving nature of technology, social media, and distance counseling and how such resources may be used to better serve clients. That is a particularly worthwhile statement relative to the response to the current pandemic. So we're going to be talking a whole bunch more about pieces from the code and how they apply to scenarios as we go forward.

I should say, though, as I start out, one of the roles that I played is that I'm a member of the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification Ethics Committee. My comments-- they are on behalf of me, Dr. Rob Froehlich, not on behalf of the CRC overall.

So let's talk a little bit about distance counseling. The codes of ethics, both the American Counseling Association and the CRC Code of Ethics-- the most recent versions, ACA being 2014 and CRC being 2017-- these are the first versions of codes of ethics that even talked about distance counseling.

So what is distance counseling? According to the American Counseling Association Code, distance counseling and such technologies include but are not limited to computer hardware and/or software, telephones and applications, social media, internet-based applications, and

other audio and/or video communication or data storage devices or media. So it is a big range of things.

So distance counseling covers things all the way from telephone calls and emails and text messages, all the way up to counseling using platforms like Zoom-- goodness knows we've all become a lot more familiar with the Zoom as of late-- and doxy.me. Perhaps if you have medical appointments or some telecounseling benchmarks, your provider maybe have even used doxy.me.

So this range includes things that are synchronous, where you are in real time, like Zoom, or asynchronous, where it's strictly text-based. Those of you who have taken distance education courses in the past realized that some of those courses are conducted all at the same time, where you're in a place with Zoom or some other technology. And others are documents or posted asynchronously, like this webinar right now being recorded.

For those of you who are interested, too, there actually is a credential to become board certified in tele-mental health provision. So we have a link here on the slide to cce-global.org that will detail, if you are interested, what those requirements are to become a board-certified tele-mental health provider. At this point, I'd like to turn it over to one of my colleagues, DJ Ralston, who is going to share a little bit with us about what she thinks are some benefits of counseling at a distance. So DJ?

DJ RALSTON: Sure. Thanks, Rob. Yeah. So as we make this change, there are definitely some benefits that come with distance counseling and telehealth in the age of the pandemic of COVID-19 and what we're dealing with.

And as cases continue to grow, one of the benefits about counseling is it does allow for social distancing. You can get services or provide services in a way that doesn't require folks to be in physical seats with you. And that allows, actually, a greater access to folks. Because think about it. We probably see folks who potentially are at greater risk of the complications of contracting COVID-19. So that's something to think about.

The other really great thing-- I think it makes more accessible in the fact that there's no need to travel to a provider. So if we think about it, a lot of times, too, sometimes the folks that we may be working with may not have the income means to be able to necessarily get there and/or the transportation issues. So that is another consideration that is really a great benefit-- is not needing to travel.

The other thing is it allows a degree of privacy that helps with decreasing stigma associated with seeking services. The more widespread and available it is and the fact that it can be done with a greater degree of privacy without the need to travel, it leads to perhaps a decreased stigma because more people are accessing it. And therefore it becomes more, quote unquote, "mainstream." So Missy, I was thinking that you could talk to us about the challenges.

MELISSA DIEHL: Thanks, DJ. So you know with all of the benefits, there are a few considerations that we have to think about with regard to potential challenges, not necessarily to restrict our use of technology, but just to make sure that we are considering both for the provider, which may be the VR counselor, might be some of our other providers that would typically be doing in-person services, but also the client or the consumers that we're working with.

So on the provider end or the staff, having that awareness of the different various laws in the different jurisdiction, making sure that the technology that you're going to use and deploy-- you are competent in that technology and familiar with it, and understanding the background and the technological implications of things like encryption, PHI, PII, all of those types of things.

And also, on the client or consumer side of things, making sure that the client has a basic understanding of the technology that you're going to be using with them and that they feel comfortable with that technology and also having access to any type of appropriate technology or assistive technology that they're going to need in order to be successfully accessing the technology that you're going to be using. And I'm going to turn it over to Rob.

ROB FROEHLICH: OK, great. So I mentioned before the most recent version of the CRC Code of Ethics that went into effect in 2017. Some of the technology-related issues in that newest code were that technology really now is infused in everything that we do. So in former versions, there was one section that dealt with all things technology.

Now the code infuses topics like, when we're talking about confidentiality, we're going to talk about the technological implications. If we're talking about relationships with clients, we're going to talk about things like personal virtual relationships and give more description about that and actually prohibiting personal virtual relationships with clients through social media. The code also provides greater clarity for informed consent and disclosure and distance counseling and addresses some required practices in the use of social media. And we're going to talk a little bit about those as we go further along in this webinar.

So this used to be a much easier training topic, ethics and technology. We used to just say, no, just don't do it. We still say no to a lot of things, like I just mentioned about personal virtual relationships. We're not friending clients. But we've really had to think about, how do people get jobs? And we have to use technology because there's lots of screening tools.

And also, there are some generational issues, too. If you don't text with some of your younger clients, you might never hear from them. So we really are in an evolving world, not just the fact of the need for social distance at this point. But we need to be considering how our world is changing and how technology plays a role and what things we need to consider relative to that technology.

So on the crrcertification.com website, there is a particular section that deals with social media resources. So what I want to stress as we go through this morning overall is that regardless of the tool that you're using, rehab counselors are held to the same level of expected behavior and competence.

It doesn't matter if it's in person or at a distance. We're held to the same ethical principles. We're held to the same code. And our behavioral expectations are the same. So there's information in this particular link relative to informed consent and disclosure, online interactions and boundaries, addressing noncompliance of these issues, and thoughts relative to those topics as well.

So before you get started using technology or before you start thinking and analyzing about your approach to using technology in your provision of rehabilitation counseling, think about what digital tools and technology are available to deploy. Think about the individual's experience with technology.

Are they smartphone savvy? Do they know how to use the tablet? Do they understand apps? Do they understand the implications of where data goes with apps? Do they understand your particular policies and approaches relative to email, texting, et cetera?

Think about your experience with technology. I feel very comfortable with some forms of technology and not comfortable with others. So it's really important for me to know that I have a confidence before suggesting that I work with clients using technology.

Concepts about being able to connect with Wi-Fi-- the availability, the implications, what happens when it cut out, the individual's network of support, and ways to connect there. What are the agency policies and procedures, say, for your place of employment? When we talk about thinking about, what are those digital tools and technologies that are available, are those tools secure, is a huge piece of the question. Are they HIPAA-compliant?

So now I've given you a whole laundry list of things to consider. But the last thing-- setting up your home and how to prepare your client for setting up their home for things like confidentiality, not having other people hear what's going on, no distractions.

We've all been on those zoom meetings with barking dogs and all sorts of other things. And I have one of those myself. But it's an important consideration to think about when you are going to be providing services at a distance. So at this point, hey, Melissa Diehl, would you share some thoughts with us relative to confidentiality?

MELISSA DIEHL: Sure, Rob. So some of the things that we want to think about when we're considering confidentiality is just having that awareness and consideration that we want to just walk through.

Even though we're now working remotely and providing services via telecounseling or via distance or remotely, virtual, however you want to describe that, the requirements to maintain confidentiality don't necessarily change. We just have to think about them differently and think about them with the tools that we're deploying. So I'm going to turn it over to DJ, who's going to take us through an example so we can start to further examine it. DJ?

DJ RALSTON: OK. So I am going to read this example. And then Rob, I was hoping that you'd be willing to help me out. So can I read this to you and then see what you say about this and weigh in on the confidentiality issue?

ROB FROEHLICH: I think that sounds like a great plan. You bet.

DJ RALSTON: All right. Awesome. So John is an 18-year-old transition student/consumer that you've been working with. Throughout your interaction with John, there has been tension between he and his mother. While John's mother wants him to go to college, John wants to work or participate in some sort of on-the-job training. He doesn't feel that college is for him. And the data you have matches that feeling.

After a particularly challenging meeting with John and his mother at odds over his postsecondary goals, you receive an email from John indicating that he's been wrong all along and really does think that college is the best option for him. He demands that you begin researching schools and funding sources for him immediately. Rob, what thoughts do you have regarding this situation? And how would you proceed?

ROB FROEHLICH: Yeah. So DJ, when I've had the great opportunity to work with graduate students or with lots of different rehab counselors in practice and we talk about the code of ethics, I think people's first reaction is, well, that's a really long, big document. And it's very dry information.

I'd like to encourage you all, though, to realize that when you are in challenging situations-- and challenging situations are the ones that make you think. I'm just really not sure which way to go. I feel like I have a dilemma-- the code of ethics is really one of the first places that you should go to help you resolve your potential dilemma.

So in this situation, boy, it sounds like things turned really quickly there. All of a sudden, there was a big change of heart. So a couple of things-- let's start with confidentiality, privileged communication, and privacy.

So the beginning whole part of this section looks at-- we have counselors recognizing "that trust is the cornerstone of the counseling relationship." And they really "aspire to earn the trust of current and prospective clients by creating an ongoing partnership, establishing and upholding appropriate boundaries, and maintaining confidentiality." We have "counselors communicate the legal and ethical parameters of confidentiality to their clients in a culturally competent manner."

So this code section looks at issues like rights, exceptions, information shared with others, the capacity to consent, records, and documentation. It is fair to say as a clinician and as a parent, frequently we're going to see dynamics between younger students and parents where maybe there's not a bad intention. Maybe the best of intentions were in place.

But a particular part in the code that resonates for this scenario for me is looking at section J.3-- Confidentiality, Informed Consent, and Security. And that's this subsection Client Verification. We have "counselors who engage in the use of technology-based distance counseling to interact with clients take steps to verify the client's identity at the beginning and throughout the rehabilitation counseling process."

So verification can include things like but is not limited to using code words, numbers, graphics, or other nondescript identifiers. But even more simple than this, it has been my experience that when something seems really odd and quick, like this turn-around, a simple thing to do is pick up the phone and call John and say, "Really? Is that what you meant to tell me in that email, that you want me to be looking?"

So it's some sort of verification that that request did, in fact, come from John and maybe not from somebody else. So we're talking about relationships, about confidentiality, but also really about boundaries. So DJ, I'm wondering if it would be OK at this point for you to talk a little bit with us about some boundary considerations in technology and the topics we're talking about today.

DJ RALSTON: Sure. Boundaries-- boundaries are actually one of my favorite things to talk about, Rob. So I'm really glad that you brought this up. So there are some things that we really need to consider as it relates to boundaries. And we can look at Section A, specifically The Counseling Relationship. And we can drill down even further and look at section A.5, Roles and Relationships with Clients.

So the code basically states that there's to be no sexual or romantic relationships with clients and that you should avoid the same types of relationships-- so again, no sexual or romantic relationships-- for five years with former clients or an unlimited time for those who may be exploited or harmed. So this includes considerations relating to extending professional boundaries and related topics.

So I think a lot of times, some of us think that these are no-brainers. And we even sometimes, I think, question why this might be in the code because it seems like common sense. But it's here because it is something that we need to consider. And five years actually seems like a long time. Sometimes two years might seem like a long time.

So it really is important that we go back and that we look at the code. We consider what that is. We consider the nature of those relationships. And if you think about that, in a lot of ways, I think because of social media and the access to social media, that creates more opportunities, essentially, for those boundaries to get crossed more quickly or sooner, I guess.

Because if we think about it, a lot of times we might be maybe working and counseling folks in an area where we don't live. So the likelihood of us running into a former client might be less, whereas once we get on the wide world of the internet, the interweb is kind of the great equalizer and can bring people together. So this is really an important thing for us to think about.

MELISSA DIEHL: DJ, I'll go ahead and read through our first scenario here and then turn it over to Rob, who can take a deeper dive and walk through what the code says with regard to this situation. So Casey Counselor has been working with Jenny for a little over a month on career development and college planning services. She's an 18-year-old high school senior who is on your transition caseload.

Jenny is requesting that you follow her on Twitter, as she communicates primarily through this medium. And Casey decides to follow Jenny on her Twitter to help facilitate communication because Casey believes this might be a good way to develop a rapport with Jenny.

So some of the things we want you to consider with this scenario is number one, do you think this is going to present a dilemma for you? And then number two, are there some generational issues at play here? And Rob, what does the code say for us to think about?

ROB FROEHLICH: Sure. So let's put a little bit of context around this, too. Relative to this communication, the first question or thought that I would have is thinking about, OK, well, why would that communication be different or more helpful? And why would I be using that?

If we look at Section J in the code and we think about professional disclosure statements-- and you all know the professional disclosure statement is that starting out document that says, here are the roles in the relationship. Here's what we're working towards. Here's your role as a client, what you can expect from me, what you should be participating in this relationship. Here are my credentials as a counselor. Here is what my goal is for you, those types of things right.

So you really want to make sure that you have some sort of a statement relative to social media and informed consent. Some people have blanket statements about the fact that confidentiality really can't be protected in a medium like social media. So I don't respond that way. And if that is your approach, you want to make sure that you clearly articulate that so that the client doesn't feel like you're not communicating with them on that tool because of something about the client. Really, this is just your professional practice.

One section, Section J.4.d-- I really like the expansion of this. Remember I said earlier on this was an easier topic? We just said no. Just say no. We also talked about concerns for the counselor's privacy. There was a lot of discussion and trainings years ago about, how do I know that my clients won't be following me or this, that, or the other?

We've really switched around to-- and this is a good, in my opinion, evolution. And it makes a lot of sense. We should be respecting the privacy of our client's presence on social media, too, just like we would never have followed them around day to day to see where they were going with their friends or whatnot. I really think that there's some corollaries there, too.

And thinking about maintaining confidentiality on social media and describing what can and cannot be guaranteed or what have you-- many of you will have taken courses in group counseling. And one of the very first things that you start out with is saying, it is our intention for things to stay in the group. But there is no way that I can 100% as the facilitator of this

group promise that things are going to maintain confidential. Having discussions with your clients on topics like this are particularly important.

And that brings us to some topics that I'm going to turn over to Melissa Diehl. Missy, would you share some thoughts about netiquette? And what is this concept of digital footprints with us as well?

MELISSA DIEHL: Sure, Rob. So we have some considerations that we want you to kind of think about when it comes to netiquette or digital footprint. And we have a few quotes that we've captured here on this slide that we think really encapsulate some of the things that we want you to consider.

So the first is from the professor at Oxford who says, "a society in which everything is recorded will forever tether us to all actions, making it impossible, in practice, to escape them." And "without some form of forgetting, forgiving becomes a difficult undertaking." I think that's really a powerful quote, as is the other from Texas AM SHRM Professional, who said, "the worst thing you've done is the first thing people will know about you."

So two, I think, pretty good quotes that resonate as we think about the way we navigate and what we leave behind within our digital footprint. So when we refer to netiquette or our digital footprint, we're really referring to that unique set of traceable digital activities, actions, contributions, and communication that we leave behind as we maneuver through the internet or on any digital device or platform.

So some of the things we want you to really consider is, what does your digital footprint look like? And would it help or hinder your chances of being hired for a job you really wanted? That's really important to think about for ourselves as a professional, but also helping the customers that we work with understand what this means for them. And I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to DJ, who is going to walk through our next scenario regarding the use of social media.

DJ RALSTON: Thanks, Missy. All right. So we're back to our friend Casey Counselor. And Casey's now getting a bit more than she bargained for in following Jenny on Twitter.

So Jenny's tweets now include everything from the mundane narrative about what she had for breakfast to details of her sex life and broadcasting the debilitating symptoms that she experiences as a result of her disability, not to mention the fact Jenny's now taken to @ing, or tagging-- but @ing Casey whenever Jenny is having disability-related symptoms. So Rob, how will this impact Jenny's and Casey's counseling relationship, do you think? And what are some tools you think Casey could use to help resolve this issue?

ROB FROEHLICH: Well, I'm glad you asked those questions, DJ. How will this impact your counseling relationship? This would be a challenge for anybody. Let's talk about some considerations here.

This first section, Section A.5 of the CRC Code of Ethics, talks about relationships and nonprofessional interactions with clients. And this is the area about avoiding virtual professional relationships. And then the second area is that-- it's actually what we were just talking about before relative to social media and your approaches toward so many things. All of the seasoned counselors with us today are likely to have this topic resonate with them.

So many relationship issues relative to providing counseling services can be addressed in the very beginning of the development of the relationship. This is the area where you want to be thinking about, what does your disclosure statement say about social media? And you might be thinking forward about, what do you want to add in there in terms of, no, I'm not going to follow you on Twitter, if that's going to be your approach, and articulating that? Because that would take you out of this whole process.

Sometimes we have to think about, what are some potential implications for following somebody on a social media platform or what have you? And sometimes we have to be a little more cautious than we might like to. This can really be a good learning experience. Casey had the best of intentions. And she really wanted to be as accessible as she possibly could be. But this sounds like it maybe was not the best plan for this interaction between Casey and her consumer of services.

So what do I do with that? I think you look at this as an educational perspective rather than as an opportunity to be more punitive. I think that this is a really great conversation that Casey and Jenny can have where it can be looking at-- maybe Jenny never really thought that forward in what that relationship would be. And maybe weave into that kind of discussion that they're having, this educational perspective, a discussion of support networks, coping skills, how permanent social media information is.

And then maybe, even more importantly, too, if we're providing vocational rehabilitation services that are directed towards career selection, what kind of impact can information on social media have upon getting a job in one way, shape, or form or another? Young people have a wonderful zest for life. But sometimes it's worthwhile to have a little bit more of a discussion on thinking further down the road and those types of implications.

So even six, seven years ago when we would talk and do training relative to ethics and social media, an approach-- we would always use some sort of an example of, here's what not to do on social media. Things have changed so much over the past number of years relative to the uses of social media.

So I think we have to have conversations with our clients in different ways relative to other considerations that they need to have. I think DJ and I have had the opportunity to chat on several occasions. And I think that she wanted to share some thoughts relative to that topic with us, too.

DJ RALSTON: Yeah, Rob. So I do actually have a couple of things to add. So first of all, I'll say that I think it's really great that we're not in a situation anymore where we're being really

prescriptive about what you should and shouldn't do on the internet. But I do think that there are some conversations that are definitely worth having with our consumers as we're working with them.

The internet and the fact that social media is so ubiquitous between Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, Instagram-- I'd say Facebook, but let's be honest, the zoomers aren't there, are they? But anyway, there are some conversations that we want to have. And social media can be a great place to cultivate fun, to also develop support networks, to maybe even add some coping skills to your toolbox by what you've learned from other folks.

But social media can also be a place that can be a detractant, quite frankly. It's a place where you're finding a toxicity there because you're constantly comparing yourself. Or your consumers are constantly comparing themselves to others.

Or the other thing that is a cautionary tale of social media is the fact that sometimes we can get caught in our own echo chamber. So if you are in a place or in a space in your corner of the internet and you're constantly hearing the same things, and they're being constantly reinforced even though you might be trying to make changes, those are some things to be aware of.

So Rob, I guess instead of having conversations about, you should do this. You shouldn't do that, it's more conversations of just making sure people really are aware of how they're taking in social media, how that's impacting their own internal sense of self. And is that impacting their behavior? So just like we would advise consumers relative to other activities and thinking about what feels good and what doesn't, we really need to apply that same kind of lens and those same type of conversations relative to self-advocacy and self-care for our clients in the same way.

ROB FROELICH: Yeah. DJ, those comments really resonate with me. And what I'm hearing a little bit is you're saying more so that it is not about necessarily a punitive approach or a mandated approach. But it's about discussing critical thinking and using critical thinking skills.

And I think that that is a wonderful role that a counselor can play relative to encouraging critical thinking. So thanks for sharing that with us. And while you're still there with us on the mic, I'm wondering if you could share some thoughts about some rules of engagement, if you will.

DJ RALSTON: Sure. So #rulesofengagement, right? So what are the considerations that we really need to think about when it comes to our rules of engagement? As we previously saw with Casey Counselor and Jenny and the Twitter scenario, things can maybe escalate a little bit more quickly than we might be prepared for.

So you really want to think about, what are you comfortable with in terms of your counseling relationships, in terms with those boundaries? What are you comfortable with relative to technology? do you know how to use Snapchat? Do you know how to use TikTok? Do you really want your dancing behind out there for everybody? Because let's be honest, that's what TikTok is all about. It's all about the dancing, right?

So you want to think about the technology you're using, your client needs. Also, for especially those of you that are working in the public sector, you really need to think about, what are your organization's policies and procedures? And what is the interplay of all of these different variables? So where do these things intersect? And how are you thinking about those?

Something else, other considerations to think about-- your own privacy. What types of things are you doing? Are you just using Facebook? Do you just have social media profiles that are essentially your in-real-life personality? Do you have a fake profile somewhere? What does that look like?

So thinking about your own privacy, also your client's privacy, even more so your client's privacy, thinking about-- if we think back to that Casey Counselor scenario with Jenny and the fact that Jenny was broadcasting, tweeting into the void about what she was having for breakfast and the activities of her sex life, thinking about, are those things we really need to know about our client? Are they things that are appropriate for us to know? Are those things that potentially might even impact our ability to counsel?

Now, while we all like to say that we are not biased as much as possible and we're adhering to our code of ethics, those are things that you will have to work harder at. So what are the potential risks associated with your approach, thinking about that relative to using social media? And do you have a standard approach? Can you articulate it?

So is it that you're like, I don't friend people on Facebook. Or perhaps the only place I friend or follow people is on LinkedIn. What is that approach? Can you articulate that? And with that, Missy, I think I'm handing it over to you to talk about the next scenario.

MELISSA DIEHL: Thanks, DJ. So unlike our last scenario, where Casey the counselor knowingly engaged in social media with her consumer, this next scenario we want to walk through is, what happens when we unintentionally stumble across or come in contact with our consumer online? And what kind of boundary or conflict it may present is an ethical dilemma for us to consider.

So in this scenario, while scrolling through Twitter and trending hashtags, you come across a tweet that's gone viral that resonates with you. You click through to the profile. And upon seeing the Twitter bio, you realize it's one of your consumers.

So some of the things that we want to think about are, what do you do? Do you dive in and read through all their tweets, mentions, and likes? Do you start following your consumer? Do you inform the consumer that you saw their tweet? Rob, maybe you want to help us walk through this a little bit.

ROB FROEHLICH: Yeah. I'd be happy to do that. And I'm going to start with what seems like maybe an odd approach. But we always think about confidentiality. And we think about our connectivity in the world. Whether we live in a big city or we live a small town or a very rural

place, we think about the fact that there are potentials for us to run into folks who we're providing services to in our community in one way, shape, or form of another.

A lot of times, we talk about rural communities. And in rural communities, the person who coaches the baseball team is married to the person who-- there's so much connection. But social media is bringing us together in different ways now. We have to think about, well, what would we have done in a scenario where we do run into somebody in person?

Well, think about this. What if you saw a client give an absolutely amazing presentation? You were only at the presentation venue for personal reasons. You had no idea that the client would be there. And the encounter is random. Would you go up and talk to the client? What implications would that have on your relationship, on the client's privacy, on disclosing your role with the client?

And is social media different? Because if you are following, one of the questions that Missy posed was, do you dive in and read all their tweets? Do you start following your consumer? And I know lots of people have lots of followers. But that always begs that question of, well, how do you know this person?

It would be the same way if you walk up after that presentation and you start a conversation that indicates you know this person. That is going to, in some potential way, threaten the confidentiality of the person. Now, if they come and they approach you, that's a little bit of a different scenario. But these types of considerations, now that we're in this different world and usage of social media, are important to think about.

I've got a few other things that I hope you all will give me a few more minutes to think about. But when we're talking about competence and digital media and social media, I have a few things I'd like to leave you with that I think are worthwhile considerations.

So Section J, as I've been mentioning, deals with technology and the code of ethics. It leads off with competence. So "when technology is used in the counseling relationship, rehab counselors are held to the same level of expected behavior and competence as defined by the code regardless of what you're using."

Legal considerations also-- we have "counselors who use technology, social media, and/or distance counseling in their practice understand that they may be subject to laws and both the rehab counselor's practicing location and the client's place of residence." This is really important.

Counselor licensure boards-- they've relaxed things a bit around the pandemic right now. But in general, if you are in Virginia, and your client is in, let's say, Ohio, and you are not licensed in Ohio and you're providing counseling services, that can be a bit of a challenge. And you may not be-- you have to check. It's different from state to state.

But you've got to be aware of all of those practices. And what are the laws, not only where you're physically located, but where your client is as well? We have one more scenario we'd like to share that DJ is going to relay for us.

DJ RALSTON: OK. So here's the deal. Randy has been a VR counselor for 22 years. Due to COVID-19, he has to find an alternate means to communicate and meet with his consumers other than the traditional face-to-face meeting in his office. One of Randy's consumers does not respond to emails and texts but is always talking about their Snapchat. Randy considers downloading Snapchat as a means to communicate with their consumer.

What things should Randy consider and/or investigate before implementing such a strategy? Are there ethical considerations Randy needs to think through before he uses social media as a method for communication? So Rob, do you want to unpack those questions for us?

ROB FROEHLICH: Absolutely. I'd be happy to do that. There are some things that we should be thinking about. And that is accessibility of platforms. Are there disability-related or other barriers that could be related to an individual's disability? Is there socioeconomic status-related issues that may preclude access to reliable internet service or to devices?

Does my consumer live in an area where access to high-speed internet is going to be a challenge? Because depending on what type of platform I'm going to be using, some are very dependent on high-speed internet.

What do I know about the particular platforms? So in this particular scenario, Snapchat is what we're talking about. And I know that's something my kids use. I don't know anything about it. That's full disclosure. I wouldn't use that as any sort of information sharing counseling-related platform. I know nothing about it.

Are there legal considerations that I should be thinking about, too? So really, when we go back to this competencies, if we're using some sort of technology, we have to be aware of it, confident, understanding of what legal considerations might be, and also thinking about what type of accessibility issues do we have to think about for that particular type of technology.

We need to think about things like, is the platform HIPAA-compliant? And that's not just the one overall question. But it is the privacy rule, personal health information, who can disclose and under what circumstances. Is something that would be PHI-related going to be out there?

The security rule-- do we know that there's been an assessment of risks and threats to confidentiality? And have we implemented safeguards? And then the breach notification rule that monitoring and identifying when a breach has occurred and the requisite actions after a breach has occurred-- all of these things we have to consider relative to choice of a platform that we're going to use.

So we want to think about, if we work for a state agency, what are the state agency policies? If we work for another entity, what are the policies of that employer? We want to find creative

ways to find solutions for reaching our clients in safe ways. But we have to do it within the purviews of all of those topics.

And policies and procedures during this really tumultuous time are emerging. Sometimes they're slower than one would like. So all of the agencies that I've been working with are doing their very best to, in real time, address the needs of being more flexible with approaches. But we're still in the development phases in many places.

A few more considerations before we wrap things up today, other areas of importance-- so relative to-- I had the good fortune to work with a lot of different state agencies and to examine their social media policies and procedures. Very first important thing is the distinction between, are you speaking for yourself on behalf of yourself or on behalf of the organization that you work for?

There cannot be anything illegal related to your social network policy. You can't advocate politically using state media. You can't advertise or represent a business. Obviously, nothing pornographic can be related to your social media presence. There should be nothing discriminatory of any group of persons. And confidential information needs to be treated as such. So these are really important considerations relative to social media.

An important distinction for discussion with consumers, with colleagues, with students is, how can I tell the difference between the digital world and the in-person world? What's real? Those lines have become much more blurred as of late. There's actually a psychological effect. J. Suler, a social psychologist, published on this. And it's this thing called the "online disinhibition effect." And it's basically that people do and say things online that they would never do in a face-to-face world. Hey, DJ, I think that you and I had a conversation about this. And you wanted to jump in a little bit on this topic, too.

DJ RALSTON: Yeah. So Rob, just thinking a little bit, kind of linking back to the discussion that we had earlier relative to the fact that we're shifting the conversation about the use of the internet and social media with our consumers from the dos and don'ts to just things to consider, one of the other things to really consider is this whole concept of the online disinhibition effect.

So the internet, and particularly social media, can be a place that-- and I referenced this earlier-- that can be a bit toxic at times. And in large part, it's due to what you're talking about here. And that's that people don't necessarily always attach the same weight to their words when they're putting them out into the void of being online.

At the same time, there are folks who tend to really personalize those things or take those things that someone who may be disinhibited is saying really personally. This is how we get into situations of online bullying and, again, looking at some of the things that we need to be aware of relative to our own self-care and how this impacts who we are and how we move through the world.

So I just wanted to throw this back out there that-- again, counselors, if you're having conversations about the use of social media with your consumers, using this concept of the disinhibition to remind consumers that not maybe everything that's lobbied at them is something that they should be really taking to heart, so to speak. In the same way that social media can make people feel good by the number of likes that they're getting and the number of shares and retweets and resnaps and regrams and whatever the terminology is for the app, the same can be true of the fact that sometimes they can be impacted by some of the negative things or the piling on that can occur.

So those are, again, things to discuss with our clients in terms of taking care of themselves and being aware of how they're using that media and how that's affecting them. So thanks for letting me jump in on that, Rob.

ROB FROELICH: Yeah, that's really great information that you just shared with us too, DJ. So a couple of other things as we're closing now, too-- just thinking about simple things like texting. Are there generational preferences?

Well, if my kids are representative-- and I think that they are. They're about 20 and 22 right now-- if I want to hear from them, I have to text them. They're not sure that the phone actually has a piece where they can talk through it. And I don't think that they're not representative of other young people, too.

But earlier on, we were worried about counselor privacy and what have you. There are some things to think about relative to texting. Is your phone a state agency phone? And if not, if it's your personal phone, there are ways to set your texting ability so that it goes through your email address. And it's not your personal phone number.

And then back to things like professional disclosure statements, what if you're in a situation where you're out of a coverage area, and you can't respond immediately? Having a statement relative to what's a reasonable expectation of a response time is helpful. Texting implies immediacy. And if there is a way that you can give a range of-- here's a normal time for me to respond. And it's not immediate, like within 24 hours or 48 hours or whatever. Those are some things for you to think about as well.

Google is a treasure trove of information. And frequently, we will be tempted to find out information about people by googling them. So if we're working with clients, we want to be thinking about, why am I using Google to find out information about my clients? Am I looking because I'm curious? Because if you are, that's the wrong reason. That's not ethical.

Are you're looking because there's an employment-related intention? Is there a way you can involve the consumer in the process? Because that takes out the whole overinvestigation piece of it if you involve the consumer in the process.

And also, you want to make sure that you have a standard that you use to make decisions on this topic so that you're not profiling consumers. If you have a general practice that you are

going to sit down and you're going to google with your client to see what shows up relative to what employers are going to find, then that's fine. You should do it with everybody. But you shouldn't pick and choose who you're going to do that with because then you're profiling people.

LinkedIn requests-- how do you manage that? LinkedIn is really a more professional form of social media. And frequently, consumers or students will ask relative to you linking in with them. If you don't choose to link, how do you respond to those requests? Having a standard policy or script and using it every time is important.

I get requests from students frequently relative to LinkedIn. And what I say is my policy is, as soon as you graduate, I'm happy to link in with you. But while you are a student, I'm happy to talk with you about career development and career opportunities at any point. But I see LinkedIn as a form of social media. And I don't link with students because I think that blurs the lines while they're enrolled in classes.

For me, the bottom line is, really, for social media and communication tools, what am I trying to accomplish? Why will using this particular tool or platform make me more effective, quicker, or have better quality? What may be some potential downfalls or barriers associated with using this tool? And what are the accessibility issues associated with this tool?

So the bottom line of all that we're sharing there, for me, comes down to evaluating these questions and seeing why I am choosing to use or not use particular communication tools. My colleague, John, I think you're going to share some resources and wrap us up today.

JOHN WALSH: Thank you, Rob. Today's presenters provided us with, really, lots of great information and food for further thought. I really want to encourage you to please be sure to download our PowerPoint presentation from today's session, as our presenters have provided some really valuable hyperlinks to continue your education in this topical area, including the CRC Code of Ethics and the ACA Code of Ethics.

So we provide you those links so you can connect with that. Download those code of ethics. And we really do believe that this information is valuable. And we really want to encourage you to use the Code of Ethics as a way to guide your practice. This information can be accessed at our website at trainvr.org.

My thanks to our great team of presenters today that really provided us with valuable information, insights, scenarios as we continue to use digital media more frequently in our daily work and how that could really benefit those we serve. But we want to make sure we do it in responsible and ethical ways. And I think today's presentation has giving you some of the tools and some of the insights on how you could proceed in doing that.

In summary, we looked at today the evolving nature of professional roles and the range of digital platforms we may utilize in our daily work. How they could benefit those we serve. Some of the challenges we face when we use these techniques.

We looked at some of the considerations of netiquette and a digital footprint in our work and how that digital footprint could really follow us around for a long time-- and our consumers as well. How our practice needs to align with our codes of ethics. And how we could use our codes in proactive ways to deal with potential dilemmas when they arise in our practice.

We looked at some of the rules of engagement in the digital world, including, what is your standard approach as a counselor? Dr. Froehlich often talked about that disclosure statement, that statement about, what is your typical practice? It's something you want to think about as a counselor and develop.

And the importance of competence in digital media and in social media as we proceed in our work as a counselor. And lastly, also looking at it's important for you as a professional to understand the policies and procedures within your specific organization to ensure you're aligning your professional work with those regulations within your organization.

As Dr. Froehlich had mentioned at the beginning of the presentation, if you have any questions for our team, we are providing our email addresses for all three of our presenters-- Dr. Rob Froehlich, Melissa Diehl, and DJ Ralston. I want to thank you so much for the great presentation today.

I also want to thank you, our participants in today's webinar. Thank you for joining us. And we hope that you'll return for our future offerings from the Center. Remember to visit us at trainvr.org. If you have any questions for me broadly about the Center, you could certainly email me at jcwalsh@gwu.edu. Thank you for joining us again. Be well and do good works.