What a cold winter it has been in the Pacific Northwest! I am almost longing for the endless long days of drizzle and mild temperatures that seem to characterize most winters in Washington State.

While the possibility of Medicare provider status seems to have cooled following the results of the National election, Washington State seems to be heating up legislatively:

- The Department of Health has initiated rule-making to change the “approved educational program” requirement from a program at a university that has been approved by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) to a program at a university that has been approved by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). This is a fairly minor change, and only affects non-CACREP accredited programs in Washington State whose university is regionally accredited by the Northwest Commission for Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). NWCCU recently disaffiliated from CHEA, though remains approved by USDOE. Most universities in Washington are NWCCU accredited. Thus, when NWCCU disaffiliated from CHEA, non-CACREP accredited programs were graduating students who were no longer from an “approved educational program.” WA DOH acted quickly to initiate this legislation, which protects long-standing non-CACREP accredited programs at regionally accredited universities. Counselors coming from CACREP-accredited programs still receive a bonus of counting 500 hours toward licensure (no change there).

- The Washington State Department of Health Advisory Committee of Mental Health Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Social Workers convened on December 9, 2016. Thom Field, President of the Washington Mental Health Counselors Association (WMHCA), and Karen Langer, WMHCA Past-President, both attended to represent mental health counselors in Washington. At the meeting, there appeared to be no significant updates to draft language for WAC 246-811 regarding supervisor requirements, though draft rules are expected to be reviewed during the upcoming February meeting. The main topic of conversation pertained to disciplinary issues involving Mental Health Counselors, that has raised whether MHCs have a guiding code of ethics. The consulting Assistant Attorney General, John Macejunas, consulted with Field and Langer from WMHCA regarding the two major existing codes of ethics that counselors ascribe to, namely the American Counseling Association and American Mental Health Counselors Association code of ethics. It is noteworthy that nothing is currently written in the WA RCW or WAC with regards to a code of ethics that counselors are required to abide by.

- A major decision was made by the WA supreme court regarding the expansion of counselor responsibility for assessing threat of violence toward others. In the past, Tarasoff case law has taught us that counselors and their supervisors are responsible for
contacting the intended victim of violence before it occurs (duty to warn). The recent case of Volk v. DeMeerLeer was settled on December 22, 2016, and found a psychiatrist liable for their outpatient client’s violent acts toward others. The psychiatrist was found to be negligent in this client’s care, even though the client did not express an overt threat to a specified potential victim as is required by Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California case law. In a 5-3 ruling, the decision of the court was in favor of the plaintiffs who had sued the psychiatrist, thus upholding the duty to protect potential victims from violent acts toward others. This underscores the importance of assessing for threat of violence in outpatient settings, and may result in breaking confidentiality if the clinician feels that the client is at risk of hurting unspecified others. More information about this important court ruling is included in the Insights newsletter, written by our Treasurer, Duncan Hollomon, PhD, JD.

We are currently working to schedule a training on the assessment of potential violence. We also have a few fabulous workshops coming up shortly that are worth checking out. Both workshops will take place on a Saturday at the Good Shepherd Center in Seattle, located at the following address: 4649 Sunnyside Avenue N, Seattle, WA 98103.

- **Saturday February 25th, 2017, 9:00 – 4:00 p.m.** (6 hour session). Ann Lazaroff, MA, LMHC will describe complex issues when counseling people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ). Ann has over 20 years of experience in the mental health field and with LGBTQ clients. The training will help mental health professionals gain an understanding of the clinical needs of LGBTQ clients. It will also include how to provide culturally responsive therapy, and ways therapists can advocate for social justice. This training provides six continuing education (CE) units, which are approved for use toward licensure requirements for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers in Washington State.

- **Saturday March 25th, 2017, 9:00 – 12:00, 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.** (two 3 hour sessions). Eric Ström is back, to provide ethics training that addresses ethical use of technology and how to remain HIPPA compliant. Eric is a licensed mental health counselor and attorney-at-law. The training will be broken into two sessions with the morning focusing on online meeting platforms such as Skype, and the afternoon focusing on email, texting, and other forms of communication. Eric specializes in providing legal and ethical consulting services for mental health professionals. This training provides 3-6 (2x 3 hour sessions) continuing education (CE) units, which are approved for use toward licensure requirements for mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists, and social workers in Washington State. Attendees can choose to attend one of the three hour sessions, or both sessions for six hours total.

As any good counselor would do, I’ll wrap my January column with a reminder of my upcoming closing column in the Spring. I leave the Presidency in June, and thus expect my next column to be my last as President. It has truly been an honor to serve WMHCA over the past two years, and I will keep working hard over the next six months to continue supporting and representing mental health counselors in Washington State. As I reflect on my departure, it is worth
mentioning that WMHCA will be seeking Board members in the coming months, with an election in the Spring. If you have an interest in serving and getting more involved in the “big picture,” contact me at tfield@cityu.edu.

Stay warm out there!

Thom Field, PhD, LMHC, NCC, CCMHC, ACS