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Contemporary Issues in Forensic Psychiatric Ethics: An Educational Initiative for AAPL Members and Reflections from AAPL's 2025 Annual Meeting Panel

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A workgroup of the AAPL Ethics Committee, funded by a grant from the AAPL Institute for Education and Research (AIER), recently completed a video curriculum titled "Contemporary Issues in Forensic Psychiatric Ethics." This initiative arose from longstanding requests by forensic psychiatry fellowship directors for additional resources to support ethics training, but expanded beyond its initial vision. It now serves not only as an educational resource on forensic psychiatric ethics for forensic trainees but also as a broader offering for AAPL members. In addition, the project records for posterity firsthand accounts of the thought leaders who have shaped the field of forensic psychiatric ethics, including discussions of their theoretical approaches in their own words. These materials are now publicly available to AAPL members free of charge on the AAPL website under the "Ethical Guidelines" section and the VAAPL platform.

This video archive formed the foundation of a panel presented at AAPL's 2025 Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts, titled "Ethics in Forensic Psychiatry: Recording the Past, Shaping the Future." Rather than serving solely as a showcase of the video project, the panel situated the project within the larger historical evolution of forensic psychiatric ethics and connected that history to current efforts to revise AAPL's Ethics Guidelines.

As part of the curriculum development, current AAPL Ethics Committee members interviewed 15 thought leaders in the field of forensic psychiatric ethics using a video conferencing platform. The interviews featured both core thought leaders who shaped the field of forensic psychiatric ethics from its early development through the present, as well as several emerging thought leaders who are at the cutting edge of the field and considering the most pressing current dilemmas. With the exception of Dr. Alan Stone—who sadly passed away the same week that the project began—all of the senior forensic psychiatrists discussed in the historical overview below were interviewed for this project and are featured in the videotaped curriculum. Questions asked of interviewees included: 1) What were the most significant ethical issues in forensic psychiatry when you entered the field? 2) What ethical issue or issues have you been most actively involved in, and how did you become interested in this topic? 3) What do you see as your contribution to forensic psychiatric ethics, and how is your role related

to the work of others in the field? 4) What do you see as the challenges ahead for forensic practice from an ethics perspective? 5) In light of the recent discussions in the field of forensic psychiatry about how we should go about trying to strive for objectivity in our evaluations while practicing within an imperfect system, how would you apply your theories and experiences to the current struggle? 6) Given how the field has evolved over time, would you modify your theoretical approach at all?

Videos were compiled into two longer videos. These videos—along with an accompanying annotated bibliography with selected foundational and contemporary readings from many of the interviewees—are now available to all members free of charge on the AAPL website. In addition, in memory of the late Dr. Alan Stone, the recorded panel from AAPL's 53rd Annual Meeting in New Orleans titled, "*Remembering Dr. Alan Stone and his Impact on Forensic Psychiatry*," is also posted on the AAPL website. Together, these materials create a curated digital archive of forensic psychiatric ethics scholarship and reflection.

The Boston panel expanded on the themes captured in the video project while placing them in contemporary context. Dr. Patricia Westmoreland opened the session by describing the Ethics Committee's rationale for supporting the initiative and its broader educational mission. Dr. Ariana Huselid reviewed the development and mechanics of the project—including interviewee selection and thematic organization—and presented selected video excerpts. Dr. Richard Martinez provided a historical overview of forensic psychiatric ethics. Dr. Jacob Appel expanded on themes reflected in the later portion of the video project, including the conception of forensic psychiatry as a social good and the responsibilities of forensic psychiatrists within imperfect legal and institutional systems. Finally, AAPL President Dr. Philip Candilis discussed AAPL's Ethics Guidelines and articulated his vision for their revision, framing the historical and theoretical discussions of the panel as part of a broader, ongoing conversation within AAPL.

Ethical frameworks in forensic psychiatry have evolved tremendously over the past four decades, beginning with Dr. Alan Stone's seminal challenge. **Dr. Alan Stone (APA President, 1979–80)**, former Touroff-Glueck Professor of Law and Psychiatry in both the faculties of law and medicine at Harvard University, was a foundational thought leader who challenged the limitations of psychiatrists in the courtroom and whose critique reshaped ethical discourse in forensic psychiatry. At the 1982 AAPL Meeting, Dr. Alan Stone delivered a keynote address titled "*The Ethical Boundaries of Forensic Psychiatry: A View from the Ivory Tower.*" (1) Here, he argued that psychiatrists were bound by moral biases and could not provide meaningful value in an adversarial setting. In essence, he questioned whether the forensic psychiatrist could serve two masters, working with their patient's best interest in mind, while advancing the retaining counsel's case. His challenge became an inciting call to action for psychiatrists working within the justice system.

One of the first respondents was **Dr. Richard Ciccone (AAPL President, 1986-87)**, who alongside ethicist Colleen Clements, reviewed cases with the intention of deriving ethical principles in forensic psychiatry. Together, they published numerous works, including a response to Dr. Alan Stone titled, "*The ethical practice of forensic psychiatry: A view from the trenches.*" (2) This marked the inception of applied clinical ethics, outlining an interdisciplinary approach to providing expert opinion. In discussing applied clinical ethics, Dr. Richard Ciccone describes the role of the forensic psychiatrist as no less valuable than that of the architect, in that psychiatrists provide probabilistic answers to the courts, based on clinical data.

Acknowledging the challenges posed by providing expert opinion as the treating physician, **Dr. Thomas Gutheil (AAPL President, 1999-2000)** penned the landmark paper "*On wearing two hats: role conflict in serving as both psychotherapist and expert witness.*" (3) This highlighted the role conflict in the competing interests of clinicians whose inherent allegiance is to the patient, and legal counsel whose aim is to prevail on legal matters. Dr. Gutheil advocated for a distinct separation between the treating and testifying psychiatrist.

Expanding on the need for neutrality and objectivity, **Dr. Paul Appelbaum (AAPL President 1995-96; APA President, 2002–03)**, who trained under Dr. Alan Stone, produced "*A Theory of Ethics for Forensic Psychiatry.*" (4) Built on traditional ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, he outlined truth-telling and respect for persons as guiding principles.

Dr. Ezra Griffith (AAPL President, 1996-97) ushered in contemporary ethical thought with "*Ethics in forensic psychiatry: a cultural response to Stone and Appelbaum*," (5) which sought to expand ethical consideration beyond the objective lens. He proposed that subjectivity and storytelling were invaluable in communicating the complexities of life, particularly in a legal system where minority groups are both unfairly and overly represented.

Drs. Philip Candilis (current AAPL President, 2025-26) and Richard Martinez built on the complementary nature of storytelling as a nuanced form of expert opinion. Their collaborative work led to the concept of "*robust professionalism*," (6) which acknowledges the moral complexities of patient-provider relationships within a broader web of personal and professional identities that influence forensic psychiatric practice.

Current ethical perspectives in forensic psychiatry continue to integrate objectivity and subjectivity. **Dr. Michael Norko (AAPL President, 2016-17)** highlighted the necessity of compassion as a core component of forensic practice and encouraged approaching evaluations with a sense of humanity. This has allowed for issues such as structural racism, addressed by the likes of **Dr. Charles Dike (AAPL President, 2023-24)**, and feminist perspectives, such as issues of gender and reproduction discussed by **Dr.**

Susan Hatters-Friedman (AAPL President, 2021-22) and the inclusion of feminist values by **Dr. Navneet Sidhu**, to be embedded in forensic frameworks.

Beyond the courtroom, forensic specialists continue to examine approaches to ethical dilemmas. In correctional settings, **Drs. Raymond Patterson and Jeffrey Metzner (AAPL President, 2000-01)** have pioneered the evolution of healthcare in carceral settings, while **Dr. Rebecca Brendel (APA President, 2022-23)** has elevated forensic ethical perspectives in organized medicine and policy development.

The curriculum is accompanied by an annotated bibliography consisting of 27 core readings in forensic psychiatric ethics. These readings span foundational debates, applied ethics, role conflict, narrative and cultural perspectives, robust professionalism, and contemporary discussions addressing systemic injustice and evolving professional identity. Each citation is briefly annotated to contextualize its historical significance, theoretical contribution, and relevance for current practice. The annotated bibliography is available alongside the video archive and the recorded Alan Stone panel on AAPL's Ethics webpage, creating an integrated educational resource for fellows and general AAPL members alike.

As we look forward to the future of forensic psychiatric ethics and our role as the AAPL Ethics Committee, we continue to be committed to expanding the practice, dialogue, and analysis of ethical forensic psychiatric work. This comes at a crucial time as many are calling for continued engagement against institutional injustice. As forensic psychiatrists, as we consider the institutions we work in and with, it is paramount to acknowledge those that have paved the way for change and expansion of ethical practice and to continue to make progress. As many forensic fellowship directors have noted, the next generation of forensic psychiatrists are looking for diverse voices and rigorous guidance in a way that engages and addresses injustice, among other ethical principles. We hope this curriculum, in part, will contribute to that training.

In parallel, Dr. Philip Candilis has convened a dedicated workgroup to undertake a revision of AAPL's Ethics Guidelines during his presidential year. That revision effort reflects recognition that ethical guidance must evolve alongside developments in forensic practice and scholarship. The curriculum, video archive, annotated bibliography, and Annual Meeting panel are best understood as educational and historical contributions to the broader ethical discourse within AAPL—resources that preserve the field's intellectual development and provide context as the workgroup engages in its work.

References

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