

**Counsellor's relationship with former patient  
(14HDC00627, 25 June 2015)**

*Counsellor ~ Professional boundaries ~ Inappropriate relationship ~ Former patient  
~ Code of Ethics ~ Right 4(2)*

A woman was referred for counselling by her general practitioner. The woman saw a counsellor in a professional capacity on a number of occasions over three years.

Within one month after having ceased their professional relationship, the counsellor and the woman began a personal relationship. Both the counsellor and the woman confirm that their relationship was sexual. The counsellor and the woman's personal relationship ended after approximately six years.

Approximately two years after their personal relationship ended, the woman complained to the counsellor's employer about his relationship with her. Following an internal investigation by the counsellor's employer, the counsellor resigned from his employment. The counsellor's employer was not aware of the counsellor's relationship with the woman, prior to receiving her complaint.

It was held that the counsellor acted unprofessionally and unethically by failing to maintain appropriate boundaries and engaging in a personal relationship with a former patient. The counsellor failed to comply with professional and ethical standards and, accordingly, he breached Right 4(2).

The counsellor's employer was not vicariously liable for the counsellor's breach of the Code.