From the Editor

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The present paper discusses literature concerning the practice of bartering for mental health services in lieu of traditional monetary payment. The author contrasts the language concerning the practice of bartering found in the respective ethical codes for each profession, and presents literature describing both risks and potential benefits of bartering arrangements. The primary risks of bartering include liability concerns and the potential for harmful or exploitive dual relationships. The primary benefits are that bartering makes mental health services available to those who cannot afford traditional fees, and allows for a culturally relevant compensation method for those whose cultural backgrounds emphasize the practice of bartering.

Across disciplines, helping professionals are charged with offering services, without discrimination, to a diverse client base with respect to gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, cultural background, and socioeconomic status (American Counseling Association, 2005; American Psychological Association, 2002; Clinical Social Work Federation, 1997; National Association of Social Workers, 1996). This obligation leads some professionals, in an effort to serve as many clients as possible, to agree to enter into unorthodox bartering agreements with some clients who either cannot afford the professional’s fees or whose cultural background emphasizes the use of barter transactions (Thomas, 2002; Zur, 2008).

With the exception of the Psychology profession (American Psychological Association, 2002), the ethical standards of the various helping professions discourage the practice of bartering because of the resulting dual relationship it creates between practitioner and client (American Counseling Association, 2005; Clinical Social Work Federation, 1997; National Association of Social Workers, 1996). These standards, however, also offer guidelines to determine when such an arrangement might be appropriate. Literature on the subject of...