

Complaints Committee Report

Annual General Meeting, April 2018

Purpose of the Committee: One of the major functions of PAM is to respond to complaints from the public. The Committee's response is regulated by our By-law #1, which seeks a process that is fair to both the person with a complaint, and the psychologist who responds. The Committee then follows the same two documents that our members use in their work: PAM's Code of Conduct and the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists.

Nature of Complaints: More than half of the complaints in 2017 were related to psychological assessment (mainly insurance-based independent assessments). Other complaints were related to boundary issues, office practices, fees charged, inter-professional communication, and bias in assessment. We are seeing a modest increase over the past few years in complaints related to professionalism and office practices, and a reduction in complaints related to custody and access.

Membership: The Committee has been very stable over the past few years in its membership. It has representation from 3 members of the public: Dr. Neil Arnason, Mr. Glenn Matsumoto, and Ms. Val Stanowski. They are very active on the Committee, and have the same workload as the PAM members. The psychologists on the Committee are: Drs. Lois Edmund, Steven Feldgaier, Adrienne Leslie-Toogood, and Linda Rhodes. I have now retired from chairing the Committee, and this will be in the very capable hands of Dr. Feldgaier.

Assistance to the Committee: Other members of PAM agree to very important roles as Investigators, Expert Opinions, and remediation Supervisors. The Committee would like to acknowledge and thank the following psychologists who have assisted in 2017: Drs. Lesley Enns, Garry Hawryluk, Ed Johnson, Cathy Moser, Tim Osachuk, and Vivienne Rowan. We rely on their volunteer time and greatly appreciate their support. Our Committee requests that PAM members consider any requests to serve in these roles.

Number of Complaints: The chart below indicates that the number of new complaints in 2017 was less than half of the number received in the previous two years.

Complaint Statistics 2013 - 2017

	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013
Number of Complaints Reviewed	15	18	20	22	22
Carried Forward (from previous year)	10	7	9	16	12
New Complaints	5	11	11	6	10

Outcome of Committee Review

Closed	8	8	13	13	6
Carried Forward (to next year)	7	10	7	9	16

Over the past 3 years, the average time it took to close complaints was reduced: 13 months in 2015, 11 months in 2016 and 6 months in 2017. One file in 2017 was closed in 3 months, which is felt to be a very reasonable speed.

Complaints that are more complex typically require an Investigator. We have found that this does significantly increase the time to close a complaint. As an example, for complaints closed in 2015, having an Investigator involved increased the time in progress significantly - 4 times as long as those without an Investigator. In 2016 and 2017, it increased the time in process by about 2.5 times for closed complaints. We are always looking for means of decreasing the amount of time that an Investigator requires. However, we balance this with two other factors. First, a longer time is understandable given that these are the more complex complaints, and it takes time to engage an Investigator, set up interviews, etc. Second, our Investigators act on their own unpaid time, and we recognize that they have many other priorities in their work. PAM has also sponsored an investigator's course for our Assistant Ms. Phimister, so that she can assist in situations where the Committee needs some facts quickly, that don't require a psychologist's background.

Informal Observations: Although the number of complaints has recently dropped, we have found that the expectations of the public have increased! Some of these expectations are not realistic. Examples of this, from the past few years include:

- one person did not want the complaint sent to the psychologist, and therefore the Committee did not proceed with the complaint
- two individuals wanted to file their complaints without any documentation. Neither of these complaints have proceeded.
- two people requested that PAM find them another psychologist (and in one of these cases, the person thought that PAM's office could provide this at no charge)
- one person's complaint was related to being fired, and was seeking assistance with a personnel matter
- two complaints were related to assessments or therapy that were done

- decades ago (20 years in one case, and over 30 years in another).
- one person with a complaint expected that the psychologist be suspended from their job simply because of being investigated
 - many people making a complaint assume that the Committee members are either paid and/or are full-time, and can respond at the speed of provincial or federal agencies

Thus, one of the questions on PAM's Complaint Form is what they expect from PAM. And if this is unrealistic, we can try to advise them of this early in the complaints process. And, at 2 points on the first page of the Complaint Form, it is stated that PAM cannot award financial compensation!

Online Resources: PAM's website has information to help both our members, and a person who is making a complaint. There is a form for making a complaint, and for making an appeal of the Committee's decision. In addition, members can access on our website PAM's Code of Conduct and the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists.

Outcome of Complaints: Many complaints are dismissed. As an example, none of the 8 complaints that were closed in 2017 resulted in charges being drafted. However, in some situations where the member's conduct did not reach the level of being either unprofessional or unethical, the Committee provided comments for the psychologist to consider. Other outcomes can include a Caution; or an agreement for additional education, or training. **One psychologist has pleaded guilty to 3 charges from complaints in previous years. At the time of this writing, the matter was referred on to the next step, which is the Inquiry Committee, who makes the final decisions on the consequences for the psychologist.**

Thank you: Our Committee thanks the many members that served as our Investigators, Expert Opinions and Supervisors! We also invite members to contact us, if they have an interest in serving in any capacity.

Sincerely,

Daryl Gill, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Chair, Complaints Committee