

THE WEBSITE

You are invited to put on your most professional ethics hat (encompassing compassion and wisdom) and develop a mind-set to be a consultant for a few moments.

Dr. Sara Ross, a psychologist colleague and friend of Dr. Joan Young, has a website that includes references to publications and products that may be of interest to her clients. Books, popular films with psychological content and recordings of mindful breathing and relaxation exercises are examples. For convenience, the website includes links to several companies where clients could purchase these recommended items. Dr. Ross takes the time to review the materials before placing references on her website, although she admits that “when things get busy I do not always scrutinize material as carefully as I would like.” Nonetheless, no client or colleague has ever complained in the 10 years the website has appeared.

Recently Dr. Young overheard a conversation at a social gathering and learned that some companies offer an affiliate relationship that provides compensation in the form of a percentage of sales generated from a professional’s website. Dr. Young considers asking Dr. Ross if Dr. Ross minds whether she “borrows” some material from the website, to create her own website. Dr. Young intends to evaluate the material herself and reasons that with both she and Dr. Ross inspecting the material, there should not be any problems. It is also a convenient way for her psychotherapy clients to order books recommended for psycho-education. On her website she provides a short summary of each book and her own “star” rating of 1 to 5. Dr. Young is excited by this possibility for supplementing her income.

Dr. Young ponders whether there are any ethical problems with proceeding and establishing such a business relationship with these companies? She also wonders whether she should inform her clients of this arrangement? Confused about how to proceed, Dr. Young contacts you, a trusted colleague, for a consultation.