

Advertising Law Changes for MFT Interns & Trainees

by Benjamin Caldwell, Psy.D.

On January 1, 2012, state law surrounding advertising for MFT interns and trainees was changed. Here are a few quick facts to keep you caught up.*

1. Emails, email addresses, web sites, Facebook pages, and Twitter feeds all can qualify as advertisements under the law.

The issue is how you present yourself to the public, no matter the medium. If you include any mention of your role as an MFT intern or trainee, or any hint that you provide therapy services, anywhere in a public email (including the signature), website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, etc., it's an ad, and you MUST include all legally mandated disclosures. If you have a web site, Facebook page, or any similar device that promotes your services, it should be fully approved in advance by your supervisor, and every page should include the disclosures noted below. Email addresses and web domains that include the abbreviation "MFT" could be considered misleading if you are not licensed.

2. MFT interns must include ALL of the following in ANY advertisement:

- That you are a Marriage and Family Therapist Registered Intern
- Your registration number
- The name of your employer (note: this is a change in state law, effective January 1, 2012)
- That you are under the supervision of a licensed therapist (note: in some agencies with multiple supervisors, listing a primary supervisor's name and license number may not be possible, but you still must indicate that you are under supervision; if you are working in a private practice, since the supervisor is also your employer, you MUST include their name).

Note that you can only use the abbreviation "MFTI" in addition to, and not in place of, the fully spelled out title "Marriage and Family Therapist Registered Intern." Any advertisement must include the fully spelled out title.
Source: CA BPC4980.44

3. MFT trainees must include ALL of the following in ANY advertisement:

- That you are a Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
- The supervisor's name (as registered with the BBS), license title or abbreviation, and license number
- The name of your employer (note: this is a change in state law, effective January 1, 2012)
- That you are under the supervision of a licensed therapist (this can be dealt with just by saying "Supervised by" and then the information in part b above)

Note that there is NO acceptable abbreviation for a Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee. "MFTT" or anything similar is

never allowed. As trainees, you are unlikely to be advertising on your own behalf (agencies typically do all necessary advertising); however, it is possible for your emails, agency business cards, etc. to count as advertisements under the law, so you should remain aware of the requirements.
Source: CA BPC4980.48

Failing to meet the standards of state law for disclosure of your intern or trainee status in advertising can result in action against both your intern registration (current or future) and your supervisor's license. You are encouraged to stay up to date on changes in the law through professional associations, workshops, your supervisors, and other available resources.

* Standard caveat: I'm not a lawyer, and this should not be construed as legal advice. If you have questions about the application of this or any law, contact AAMFT or CAMFT legal staff.

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Benjamin Caldwell, PsyD serves on the faculty of Alliant International University in Los Angeles, the county's only COAMFTE-accredited program. He also writes a blog on scientific and policy advances in the field at www.MFTProgress.com. This Spring, Dr. Caldwell will be presenting a 6-hour Law and Ethics workshop, with a special emphasis on technology and social media, for the Los Angeles District of AAMFT-CA.

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Wulfson to take over some of her duties of overseeing our Networking Presentations by becoming the LA-CAMFT Events Coordinator.

Katie has shown excellent skills in understanding what components were needed to accomplish a particular task and could always be counted on to fulfill her promises and follow through with her responsibilities with a cheerful, positive attitude. She is well organized and helped the 3000 Club leadership team by creating detailed follow-up notes of decisions and discussions and creating future agendas that kept the tasks flowing toward popular and successful workshops for our entire pre-licensed community. She has already been of tremendous help in her new position as Events Coordinator.

Jonathan Flier ■