

**Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology**  
**Summary of Decision of Investigation Committee**

**Carol Shirley**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 6, 2022, a panel of the Investigation Committee (the “Committee”) of the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (“NSBEP”) concluded its investigation into a complaint against Carol Shirley, R. Psych., by issuing its decision dated September 13, 2022.

The Committee reached an agreement with Ms. Shirley with respect to the disposition of the complaint. A summary of the complaint and disposition appears below.

## **OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINT AND SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION**

This matter was initiated by a complaint dated July 29, 2021, regarding the conduct and competence of Ms. Shirley, as a registered psychologist in Nova Scotia. The conduct in question occurred in approximately 2017.

Ms. Shirley is a registered psychologist with a self-declared area of practice in school psychology.

The complainant was a former client of Ms. Shirley.

Ms. Shirley has a professional conduct history with NSBEP, with previous complaints resulting in a reprimand and conditions.

## **ISSUES**

The following issues were identified for investigation:

1. Did Ms. Shirley obtain informed consent from the complainant to conduct the treatment(s) used?
2. Did Ms. Shirley violate professional standards by using Reiki as a psychological intervention?
3. Did Ms. Shirley practice outside of her scope of competency in treating the complainant?

## **KEY POINTS RAISED BY THE COMPLAINANT**

- Ms. Shirley “took advantage” of the complainant’s fragile state by performing Reiki on them. The complainant expressed feeling misinformed about the treatment.
- The complainant noted environmental concerns during their appointments with Ms. Shirley, including the sound of aerosol spray, Ms. Shirley’s performance of “kinesis” on them, and Ms. Shirley’s statements and predictions about the death of the complainant’s spouse.

## **KEY POINTS RAISED BY THE PSYCHOLOGIST**

In her response to the letter of complaint, Ms. Shirley denied most of the allegations. She responded by detailing her consent procedures and noted she uses Reiki as a “complimentary therapy tool because of its efficacy in supporting parasympathetic dominance, increasing vagal tone, and promoting decreased heart rate”.

Ms. Shirley addressed some of the environmental concerns raised by the complainant, stating no aerosol sprays or hypnosis were used in treatment. She stated she is unaware of what “kinesis” is and denied discussing the complainant’s spouse, specifically anything with reference to predicting their death.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Informed Consent**

The Committee did not find Ms. Shirley’s actions fell below professional or ethical standards in this area.

The Committee determined that Ms. Shirley did obtain informed consent to begin treatment with the complainant, including the use of Reiki. However, the Committee also noted that Ms. Shirley’s informed consent form and written materials were lacking with regard to describing alternative services provided and the form could benefit from clearer descriptions of services delivered by Ms. Shirley.

### **2. Use of Reiki as a psychological intervention**

The Committee determined that Ms. Shirley’s actions fell below professional standards in her use of Reiki.

Reiki should not have been used in this treatment situation. When practising as a psychologist, Ms. Shirley’s primary course of treatment should always use psychological interventions grounded in evidence-based practice (e.g., approaches backed by peer-reviewed studies indicating their efficacy for the specific disorders being treated).

The complainant’s presentation was indicative of an individual suffering from moderate to severe mental health issues and impaired functioning. An evidence-based approach to the treatment of clinical psychological disorders would have been a more appropriate intervention in this case, and a referral should have been made to a psychologist with appropriate qualifications to treat an individual with the complainant’s presentation.

### **3. Scope of Competency**

The Committee determined that Ms. Shirley practised outside her scope of practice.

Ms. Shirley possesses a Master of Arts in School Psychology. The Committee’s review of Ms. Shirley’s work history indicated that prior to 2007 her work experience and curriculum vitae was consistent with that of a school psychologist.

Ms. Shirley should not have accepted the complainant as a referral/client due to the severity and complexity of their presenting concerns. Further, the Committee believed Ms. Shirley might be

practicing outside her scope of competency more broadly, treating a wide range of clients who fell outside of the limits of competency of a psychologist trained in the area of school psychology.

## **DISPOSITION**

The Committee determined there was sufficient evidence that, if proven, would constitute professional misconduct and/or incompetence, and warranted a registration sanction.

In lieu of referring this matter to the Hearing Committee, and with the consent of Ms. Shirley, the Committee ordered the following pursuant to section 35 of the *Psychologists Act*:

- Ms. Shirley is **reprimanded** for failing to meet the standards of practice expected of her in providing psychological services, specifically by:
  - providing psychological services to individuals presenting with concerns that fall outside of her scope of competency as a school psychologist;
  - failing to refer clients whose needs were beyond her competence; and
  - failing to address previously identified concerns noted in previous complaints.

The Committee believes the disposition outlined above reflects its serious concerns with Ms. Shirley's practice and conduct.

For reasons unrelated to the complaint and Committee decision, Ms. Shirley chose to retire from the practice of psychology and close her private psychology practice. In addition to the reprimand the Committee accepts Ms. Shirley's permanent resignation from the profession.