

Guest Blog - Fitness Professionals, Screen Your Clients First!

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Adapted from a Declaration of Principles of the American Bar Association and Committee of Publishers and Associations.

Fitness professionals clearly have a duty to screen their clients before they recommend, lead or supervise fitness activities for those clients. There are two general types of screening instruments available for fitness professional use with clients:

- 1. A health history questionnaire;**
- 2. A PAR-Q form.**

A health history questionnaire requires the taking of health history information from the client and thereafter the maintenance of that information on a confidential basis. It also requires that the fitness professional possess sufficient expertise to properly interpret and analyze the health history questionnaire responses and in interpreting that data, to provide accurate recommendations to the client.

The use of a PAR-Q form on the other hand, requires neither the maintenance of private health history information nor the interpretation of the results of the PAR-Q screening process. The PAR-Q is basically a self-utilized instrument by which the client determines whether or not the client needs to seek and obtain medical advice and clearance prior to the commencement of a fitness or other activity program. In the event that the questionnaire indicates to the client that they should be screened by a health care professional prior to the commencement of a fitness program, then the duty to follow up and obtain that clearance is upon the client. In the event that a client chooses not to seek health care provider clearance, then a fitness professional should definitely have the client

sign a waiver/release document in those jurisdictions where such documents are recognized. In the jurisdictions where releases are not recognized, the fitness professional should use an assumption of risk form to evidence the assumption of the risk by the client related to the failure to complete the screening process. However, a copy of the PAR-Q document should be maintained by the fitness professional either in hard-copy or other document form and the client's decision to seek or not seek clearance should be noted in the client's file. If possible, the client's decision not to obtain clearance should be evidenced on a form with the client's signature. When clearance is obtained, a copy of the clearance or a client's signature evidencing the clearance should be included in the client's file.

Are you using such a screening device? If not, why not? Be aware that the standard of care requires the use of such screening devices!

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