

BRITISH COLUMBIA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS



Social Work

General Guidance: Work Environment

2/2/2016

Summary

This document must be read in the context of the *Social Workers Act [SBC 2008]*, Social Workers Regulations and the Bylaws of the College.

Having competent, skilled and qualified Registered Social Workers delivering social work services is in the public interest. Employers, in providing a supportive work environment must recognize that the roles and functions assigned to social workers must be suited to the social worker's level of knowledge, skill and ability, combined with the social worker's level of experience. Employers must, whenever possible, rely upon social work practice leaders to provide direction and guidance as to appropriate hiring of skilled social work professionals. This recommendation is based upon increasing client safety and reducing organizational risk. A social work practice leader can best assist the employer in seeking to ensure best practices in the determination of qualifications of social work practitioners required for a specified position including the weighing of factors outlined in Section 6 of this document.

Read this document in its entirety as it provides general guidance as to the shared responsibilities of registered social workers, employing agencies, and employers to ensure professional and legal obligations are met in the safe and ethical delivery of services.

Sincerely,

BCCSW

Social Work – General Guidance: Work Environment

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1. Introduction

There are a multitude of challenges facing the profession of social work in all settings, and with the impact these changes are having on the population served, employers have requested advice from the College as to how they can ensure continued high quality social work practice within the evolving landscape of service delivery. Along with clarification of legislative and regulatory frameworks that affect social workers, employers requested direction on how to differentiate between the levels of knowledge, skill and ability pertinent to various social work positions based on the various academic levels of social work qualifications. In particular they have sought advice on the delineation between the knowledge, skill and ability of a social worker with a Bachelor degree in Social Work as differentiated from a Master level prepared social worker.

This document has been created in response to these requests and within the context of best practices to ensure the protection of the public. This document must be read in the context of the *Social Workers Act [SBC 2008]*, Social Workers Regulations and the Bylaws of the College.

The position taken by the College is based on the fundamental understanding that the likelihood of positive outcomes for clients requiring social work services increases when those services are delivered by competent, skilled and qualified social work professionals within a supportive working environment.

2. Purpose

It is in the public interest that quality social work services are delivered by registered social workers in the work environment. Therefore the purpose of this document is to ensure:

- The interest of the service users and access to professional care is paramount.
- Workplace environments are conducive to safe, ethical, and effective social work practice.
- Allocation of social work professionals on the basis of baseline knowledge, skills, and abilities required to ensure competent social work professionals in appropriate practice areas.
- Alignment of organizational policies and practices with social work practice.
- Organizations have transparent and reasonable expectations of social work practice.
- Proper use of titles for social work that are protected by law.
- Familiarity with legislation relevant to social work practice in health care.
- A general understanding of different social work qualifying degrees.
- Adherence to regulatory Standards of Practice.
- Supportive working and learning conditions in the workplace.

3. Reserved Titles

BCCSW registrants use the following reserved titles or any abbreviations thereof:

- Social Worker - SW
- Registered Social Worker - RSW
- Registered Clinical Social Worker (as approved by the BCCSW¹) – RCSW

4. Legislative Functions

A social worker must have current, full registration with the BCCSW in order to perform activities of a social worker, health care provider, or qualified health care provider as stipulated within the following legislation and accompanying regulation:

- *Social Workers Act*
- *Health Care (Consent) and Care Facility (Admission) Act*
- *Adult Guardianship Act*
- *Patients Property Act*
- *Infants Act*
- *Any other legislation that refers to Social Work or Health Care Provider*

There are numerous pieces of legislation, some partially enacted, that affect the College's registrants and the delivery of social work services to the public. Current versions of legislation are available online and accessible without charge from www.bclaws.ca; however, the online versions generally do not include sections of legislation not in force. To read proposed legislation and ancillary information, visit specific ministry websites to find relevant white papers and redline (i.e. proposed) versions of legislation that have yet to proceed through the Legislative Assembly. As changes come into effect, additional training may be required. The College will attempt to provide standards or guidelines as required to assist registrants in meeting any requirements legislative changes may impose on practice.

¹ Please refer to BCCSW Bylaw 42 for details regarding the Clinical class of Registration
2016, BC College of Social Workers

5. Definition

The *Social Workers Act [SBC 2008]* defines social work as:

"**social work**" means the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and evaluation of individual, interpersonal and societal issues through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions and strategies, to assist individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities to achieve optimum psychological and social functioning.

IFSW has approved a Global Definition of the Social Work Profession as:

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing."²

6. Social Work Practice

The *Social Workers Act* states that a registrant may practice social work. Social work is defined as above (see section 1 of the *Social Workers Act*). The *Act* authorizes the College to establish minimum requirements for registration by way of bylaws. College Bylaws, for full registration, requires graduation with a baccalaureate, masters, or doctoral degree in social work³. The information referencing qualifying degrees is informed by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education⁴.

It is important that the roles and functions assigned to social workers are suited to their level of knowledge, skill and abilities and to their level of experience. Therefore this document broadly describes the level of competence required of a social worker prior to taking on specific roles and functions in work settings. Employers and social workers may determine the level of social work knowledge, skill, and ability gained through formal education and experience that is necessary to undertake a particular role in any environment.

There are three levels of social work education in Canada: Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), Master of Social Work (MSW) or Doctorate in Social Work (PhD or DSW). The BSW and MSW qualifications are the two most common requirements for direct practice.

Entry level social workers with a BSW degree are prepared with the knowledge, skill and ability for generalist practice. Entry level social workers with a MSW degree have additional knowledge and skills in the areas of advanced practice, leadership, supervision and research.

² Available at <http://ifsw.org/get-involved/global-definition-of-social-work/>

³ The Bylaws also provide for registration under substantial equivalence to a social work degree.

⁴ Available at <http://caswe-acfts.ca/>

In general, the MSW prepared social worker, in addition to the general knowledge, skills and abilities of the BSW prepared social worker, is expected to have the following skills:

- Comprehensive knowledge and skills in **advanced practice**, and/or in **specialized practice** with individuals, families, groups, and/or communities or specific populations,
- Ability to apply knowledge of a variety of social work theories and perspectives to **critically analyze** professional and institutional practices,
- Formal preparation to take **leadership** roles in organizational and societal systems and to work towards changing oppressive social conditions,
- Knowledge and skills in conducting social work **research** and competence in evaluating professional practices,
- Ability to provide **mental health diagnosis**. Registrants with the Registered Clinical Social Worker class of registration are qualified to use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM),
- Knowledge and skills to contribute to the development and implementation of new and more equitable **social policies**, and
- May have additional specialized clinical training in **specific therapeutic interventions**.

(Adapted from the Canadian Association of Social Work Education (CASWE-ACFTS) Standards for Accreditation 2012)

It is the mandate of the College to protect members of the public from preventable harm while they are interacting with registered social workers. Increased client safety and reduced organizational risk is best ensured by having a social work practice leader provide direction and guidance as to hiring, and the efficient and correct assignment of skilled social work professionals. In seeking to ensure that all populations have access to the most appropriate services, when determining if a BSW or MSW qualified practitioner is required for a specified position, the following must be taken into consideration:

- Knowledge, skill and ability based on the level of education of the social worker,
- Breadth and depth of required social work experience specific to practice area,
- General population needs,
- Complexity, acuity and demographics of population,
- Level of practice knowledge, skill and ability required to meet identified needs,
- Level of responsibility and accountability required in the role,
- Degree of autonomy expected in a specific position,
- Leadership, management, and/or supervision skills required,
- Degree of leadership functions required, including conducting evaluations of professional practice,
- Specialised skills (ex. knowledge and experience of specific clinical practice areas and/or therapeutic interventions),

- Availability of social work supervision⁵ by a social work practice leader and
- Nature of the practice setting degree to which the position requires research and/or program evaluation.

7. Registrant Responsibilities

7.1 Competence and Integrity

Social workers are responsible for being aware of the extent and parameters of their competence and limiting their practice accordingly⁶.

7.2 Continuous Professional Development

Quality social work practice draws upon current research and evidence based best practices. Registrant's compliance with the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program is a requirement for the ongoing renewal of registration with BCCSW⁷. The Standards for CPD require registrants to:

- Undertake continuing professional development activities that enhance social work ethical conduct.
- Participate in a range of continuing professional development activities that maintain and advance professional skills and knowledge and promote positive outcomes for recipients.

7.3 Supervision

It is the responsibility of the registered social worker to seek and engage in professional supervision with a social work practice leader. Preferably, the structure and frequency of this relationship is determined between the supervisor, supervisee and employer. In the profession of social work, typically the supervisor is responsible for providing direction to the supervisee, who applies social work theory, standardized knowledge, skills, competency, and applicable ethical content in the practice setting. Supervision also contains an evaluative component. Supervision differs from consultation in that there is no obligation to comply with the recommendations of a consultant.

7.4 Standards of Practice

Registered social workers are responsible for complying with the BC College of Social Workers' Standards of Practice. The Standards of Practice are available on the College's website⁸.

⁵ Professional supervision is defined as the relationship between supervisor and supervisee in which the responsibility and accountability for the development of competence, demeanor, and ethical practice take place. NASW2013

⁶ BCCSW Standards of Practice

⁷ BCCSW Bylaws

⁸ <http://www.bccollegeofsocialworkers.ca/registrants/code-of-ethicsstandards-of-practice>

8. Agency Responsibilities

Agencies and organizations have a duty and responsibility to create and maintain a supportive and healthy practice environment for professionals, which is conducive to best outcomes for clients. This includes ensuring that regulated professionals are not put into positions in which there is a potential for that professional to be unable to meet any legal requirements related to Standards of Practice or competency. The following is informed, in part, by the International Federation of Social Workers' policy on Effective and Ethical Working Environments for Social Workers (2012)⁹.

General arrangements

- Awareness of the standards expected of a social worker ensures ethical and accountable professional practice.
- Familiarity with legal duty to report requirements of both the employer and other regulated professionals.
- Policies and procedures to prevent and address dangerous, discriminatory, abusive or aggressive behaviour of any kind in the workplace contribute to the retention of qualified staff.
- Work environments must provide space for private, confidential conversations to occur, respecting that human relationships, risk management and intervention are central to social work practice.
- Agencies employing social workers must support the access, storage and protection of client records consistent with privacy legislation. A system should exist to ensure records' availability, retention and destruction as required by legislation.
- A social worker must have appropriate access to service user records for any legal or regulatory purpose.
- Social workers should never be required to do anything that would put at risk their ability to uphold the Standards of Practice as set by the BCCSW.

9. Shared Responsibilities of Social Work Practice

The BC College of Social Workers, agencies, organizations, employers and professional social workers all share in the responsibility of ensuring the public receives safe, effective and ethical social work practice.

The BC College of Social Workers is established by the *Social Workers Act* and regulation. As the regulatory body for the profession of social work, BCCSW establishes the Standards of Practice which represent the **minimum** entry to practice competencies which a social worker must maintain in order to practise safely, ethically, and effectively. Most professionals will develop knowledge, skill and ability, often from practice experience within a particular scope or scopes of practice, but mainly from graduate level education. Agencies and organizations, such as health authorities, also establish additional responsibilities for the practice of social workers.

⁹ <http://ifsw.org/policies/effective-and-ethical-working-environments-for-social-work-the-responsibilities-of-employers-of-social-workers-3/>

The College requires all registrants to engage in continuing professional development and makes individual practitioners responsible for maintaining and advancing their own level of competence to carry out general and particular scopes of practice functions.



Level 1: The Ministry of Children and Family Development developed the *Social Workers Act* [SBC 2008] and Social Workers Regulation. The *Act*, Regulation and Bylaws form the foundation of social work practice in BC. Other relevant legislation contributes to the foundational requirements of practice (see #3, page 2 Legislative Functions).

Level 2: The BC College of Social Workers is established by the *Social Workers Act*. The duty of the College is to protect the public. The College is mandated to establish, monitor and enforce standards of practice and establish ethical standards for social work practice.

Level 3: Employers and other practice area organizations establish policies and practice area guidelines supporting best practices for the delivery of social work services by qualified and competent social workers in the workplace.

Level 4: The individual social worker is responsible for ensuring their competence to carry out a particular activity.

¹⁰ Adapted from CRPNBC "Scope of Practice Explained"

9.1 Organizational Environment

Learning organizations create and establish respectful workplaces that include:

- Regular social work supervision by qualified social work practice leaders with advanced education and therefore knowledge, generally a Master level of social work education, for the purpose of ensuring safe and effective practice.
- A regular, systematic review or evaluation of practice conducted by the organization or agency and including a social work practice leader for the purpose of ensuring quality social work service is being delivered effectively and efficiently.
- Policies based on best outcomes, both short and long term, for clients and service users respecting the value of social work to clients and benefits to the agency or organization.
- Comprehensive orientation of new employees and continuing professional development opportunities for ongoing development, improvement of practice, enhancing knowledge and skills of existing employees in specialty practice areas.

9.2 Work Load and Case Management

Workload and case management measures and maintenance is a shared responsibility between service delivery social workers, social work practice leaders and agencies or organization.

- Guidelines on workload and caseload management contribute to the ability of social workers to provide safe, high quality, effective, efficient and client focused interventions.

10. Concluding statement

The profession of social work in BC is governed by the *Social Workers Act*. The BC College of Social Workers (BCCSW) is established under this *Act* as the regulatory body for the profession. The mandate of the BCCSW is to serve and protect the public interest by governing the practice of social work through the monitoring and enforcement of registrants' compliance with the Standards of Practice and Bylaws.

This document is intended to assist readers in understanding the legislative and practice contexts of the profession of social work. A registered professional's primary obligation is to the regulatory body of the profession. When social work professionals are not supported to work safely and effectively, they may not be able to meet their professional responsibilities. It is therefore critical that agencies and organizations establish policies and workplace environments that are supportive and provide for mutually respectful professional relationships which promote positive outcomes for the public.

11. References

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