

# College Conversation



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**One of my daughters** attends school in the United States. She is fortunate in that she gets to play a sport she loves while getting an education at least partially paid for through scholarship. For her final year, she was assigned a book as pre-reading. The title of the book is “For Love of Country”. On one afternoon of my holiday, with idle hands and mind, I took a quick read through the book. It’s written by the CEO of Starbucks and is testimony to the tremendous sacrifice of many veterans, their families, and what has become an institutional lack of respect for veterans.

The book got me thinking about the situation in Canada, and I regret to say that it’s not much different. Many of our veterans return from roles, whether they be combat or peacekeeping, with significant symptoms of post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, and that is not to speak of the loss of limbs and the host of problems and issues that come with service to our country. I recall not long ago reading a story of one of our Canadian Veterans who had lost limbs as a result of an IED. New rules at Veterans Affairs required him to prove his disability every few years. Sorry, but what were they thinking, that his legs would grow back? Then there was the move to re-allocate long term support for our vets. The new plan was to give lump sum payments so that they (the returning Vets with PTS and TBI) could manage their own affairs. Wishing to be neutral in light of the current Federal election, other than encouraging every single one of you reading this to vote, I must ask again, *what were they thinking?* The short answer is that the long term cost to Government would be less because they could simply wash their hands of responsibility after the money runs out.

It was that thought that got me thinking about social work, and social workers, and registrants of the College. I suspect that many of you have read, if not the decision, then the press about the recent Supreme Court ruling. Since the release of the

Decision there has been more, including notice of an appeal by the Government. Given that the matter is still before the Courts, I'll not make further comment, other than that the Decision reminded me of other reports.

Those that spring to mind include Gove, a host of reports from the Representative's office, the report of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry, and that looking into the death of Jeffery Baldwin. The list goes on. In some, but not all, social workers are named; held to account for not only their actions but those of managers, supervisors, team leaders, and front line workers. As a regulator, I'll be the first to say that accountability is one of the things that sets a profession apart from an occupation. Accountability, Standards and Ethics are the cornerstones of good practice and in the years that I have been with the College, at conferences or at national meetings, never once have I met an individual who, in setting out to provide services to the public, regardless of the practice environment, said, "today I am going to: not be accountable, violate standards of practice, practice unethically, intentionally cause harm to a client." Don't get me wrong, I don't deny that those practitioners exist. There are historic complaint files that prove they do. That's why the College is here.

Notwithstanding the Regulatory structures that exist, it would appear to me that things are amiss. Something is missing. I can't help but think that there is an institutional lack of respect for social workers similar to that which exists for our veterans. One of the stories from "For Love of Country" has a seasoned officer giving up his military career and becoming a teacher in an inner city Chicago school. He did this because he recognized that, despite all the horrors of War, for all the significant injuries of returning Veterans, the new forefront of War was in the inner city. Every day social workers willingly engage in some of the most difficult work imaginable and they do it not for recognition or accolades. They do it in organizations that lack resources; they do it in systems that are stressed. Often they do it under attack from operations managers, bean counters, and even from other professions. I suspect that if one were to study the long term effects of practicing social work in those conditions, the incidents of post-traumatic stress or vicarious trauma would meet if not exceed that of any other profession.

I want to say to each and every one of you: thank you! I value what you do and recognize the cost many of you will pay. But my recognition is not good enough. As an organization the College has a role to play, as do all of the others, from

professional associations to Unions to educators. As is talked about elsewhere in this newsletter, the College is undertaking a complete revision of the *Standards of Practice*. These new standards will deepen support for social workers in all areas of practice. Further, the College will redouble its efforts with respect to the removal of exemptions from registration. Rest assured that the College will continue to do its work in a fair, objective and transparent manner supporting social workers from entry to practice through to excellence in practice.





**This is my final column** as Chair of the Board of the BC College of Social Workers. My term ends December 31, 2015: I have been elected to three, two year terms, and the Act does not allow extensions. Therefore, if you will indulge me, I'd like to reflect back to those early days of development of the College Board and to make a few comments about its future.

I became Chair after the first election of Board members in November, 2009, effective January, 2010. The *Social Workers Act* had been passed the year before, creating a College of Social Workers and a transition Board. As we came together, it was clear that being a College Board was very different from being a Registration Board or a non-

profit society board. We had eight elected registrants and four appointed public members, all with different and similar understandings as to what a governance board working in self-regulation was all about. We spent the first two years learning our role, working out what we could and couldn't do under the legislation, assigning work to Committees that we were charged with under the legislation, and creating new ones that we felt would help the functioning of the College generally. By our first strategic planning session in 2012, we had a fully functioning board; we had moved offices to accommodate our expanding staff; we had new staff in place; and we were moving into a deeper awareness of how to be a College. Some of our activities during that time were updating our technological requirements, going 'paperless', conducting annual general meetings remotely to expand registrants' attendance, developing a public awareness campaign and negotiating the removal of the exemption of health care social workers.

By our second strategic planning session in 2014, we had made a motion for the implementation of an entry to practice exam effective September 1, 2015, we had started significant work

on developing up to date Standards of Practice and policies, and had expanded registrants' involvement in the functioning of the College through membership on various committees, among many other activities.

At all times, our vision, developed over 40 years ago by the then Board of Registration and BC Association of Social Workers, has guided us, and that is mandatory regulation for all social workers in the province.

Looking forward, the College is moving into a new phase in terms of personnel at the Board and staff levels. Several staff who have been with us since the beginning of the College are moving on to new adventures: Christeen Young and Nicole Abram, our office administrative staff, have left us, to be replaced by Hoon Kim and another yet-to-be-named staff. We have a new staff position, Manager of Communications & Programs, occupied by Nigel Mojica who will focus on publications such as the this one and assist with the Continuing Professional Development program and Licensure Examination implementation. Makhan Shergill, Director of Professional Practice, has moved to England to accept an academic post there. Many appreciations to Nicole, Christeen, and Makhan for their contributions, and welcome to our new staff. Several Board members will be leaving, and new ones elected and appointed. Bruce

Hallsor, one of our public members, has been the longest serving Board member. For 11 years he has seen us through the transitions from the Board of Registration, beginning of the College, to now. His term ends at the end of December. Those of us who have worked with Bruce value his sensibility, attention to detail, understanding of regulation, and sense of humour.

There continues to be much work to be done in the regulation of social work. We have received indication from government that they are supportive of removal of exemptions in the Act over time. The exam will be implemented. New Standards of Practice and an updated Code of Ethics are currently being worked on. Registration numbers continue to rise, and with it, the numbers of complaints. **Relationships** need to be forged and maintained. The provincial, national and international sphere of regulation is often controversial and difficult. **The work continues to ensure the public is protected through safe, ethical, and principled social work practice.**

A personal thank you – to registrants who elected me as a member of the Board; to the Board who elected me Chair; to the staff and the Board who do such excellent work in a challenging area. **It has been a privilege to be the first Chair of the Board of the BC College of Social Workers.**

# TO OUR **NEW** REGISTRANTS

W E L C O M E

It has been the College's great pleasure welcoming over **650 new registrants** to the social work profession in 2015 thus far. The spike in registrations over the past few months has undoubtedly been due in no small part to the implementation of the upcoming licensure examination, completion of which will be required for registration with the College after September 1st 2015.

*To everyone who successfully dodged that bullet - kudos to you for getting the paperwork in on time!*

Sadly though, it was only a single bullet at the outset of a life-long war. That isn't to suggest that your competence ought to ever come into question arbitrarily, but rather that the career ahead of you promises to test your abilities in far more complex and incisive ways than any multiple-choice examination could ever hope to. You've made the admirable choice to address the needs of the province's most vulnerable and marginalized people and families: one that justifies both the esteem to which you are rightly entitled, and the high standard of accountability to the public to which your professional practice is rightly held.

The exam's impetus is to ensure that any persons bearing the RSW or RCSW designations possess the minimum level of competency required to enter the profession at the lowest possible risk to the public and to recipients of social work/services. Some find these measures to be rigorous, but surely they are no more so than is commensurate with the incredible responsibility recently put on your shoulders. While it is the College's duty to protect the public interest by establishing and supporting high standards for the social work profession, there is no doubt as to who actually makes these standards a reality: clearly it is **you**, the social worker. So with that in mind, we'd just like to welcome all of our new registrants and say **thank you** - for everything you do and everything you're going to!

**UPCOMING BOARD ELECTIONS**

If you are a registrant with the BC College of Social Workers, you’ve probably received a notice by now informing you about our upcoming board election. Board members play a key role in helping determine the College’s direction and scope of operations, and thereby shape and influence the ever-developing macrocosm of social work regulation.

Please note the following key dates:

Ballots delivered to registrants	Monday, September 28 <sup>th</sup>
Deadline to submit ballots	Tuesday, October 13 <sup>th</sup>
Election day	Wednesday, October 28 <sup>th</sup>
Results announced	Friday, November 6 <sup>th</sup>
Next board meeting	Saturday, November 21 <sup>st</sup>

**ORIGAMI**

The College is pleased to announce that we have joined the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and updated our registration management software. In late 2014, BCCSW switched to a cutting-edge, web-based system for managing registrants’ data called **Origami**. The new interface gives registrants unprecedented access to their own records and, come September, will enable the College to transition to an online application process. As we have adopted this system only recently, please expect the odd glitch or hiccup here and there and do not be shy about bringing these to our attention!

## WANTED: COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

Every year the College needs volunteers from our registrant body to serve on one or more of our committees. So far, 2015 has been an active year for our committee members:

**The Registration Committee** has upheld five refusals on the part of the Registrar in 2015. Of these, four were because of inadequate formal education and the fifth was due to the applicant's refusal to have their credentials evaluated.

**The Registration Appeals Committee** is processing its first appeal in recent memory for one of the four above-mentioned applicants with educational credentials not commensurate with those required by the College for registration.

**The Quality Assurance Committee** continues to uphold and enhance professional standards in Social Work with the ongoing Continued Professional Development program and revision of the *Standards of Practice*.

**The Inquiry Committee** is responding to an atypically high number of complaints so far this year. As of August 2015, the College has received 19 complaints compared to 19 complaints in all of 2014 and 11 complaints in 2013.

Committee members, like members of the board, work within the College's mandate of protecting the public. The appointed registrants, in conjunction with College staff, will develop and implement policies and programs related to the regulation of social workers. Committee members serve a term of one year and are eligible for reappointment. A brief description of each of the committees can be found [here](#).

To be eligible for committee membership, registrants must be in either the Full or Clinical class of registration. Appointment to a committee will be based on a registrant's skill set and social work experience and will ensure a broad demographic representation. The board is looking for registrants from a variety of social work backgrounds; interest in professional regulation is an asset, if not a must.

If you are an RSW or RCSW who is interested in taking a more active role in the regulation of your profession, **submit a brief letter of interest and an up-to-date resume** to [info@bccsw.ca](mailto:info@bccsw.ca). Please include in your letter a list of at least three committees you would be potentially interested in joining ranked in order of preference.

The selected registrants will be appointed at the board meeting on January 16, 2016. New appointees will be contacted by staff. **Thank you and good luck!**

## PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

2015 marks the third year of BCCSW's ongoing Public Awareness Campaign. You may have seen our ads online, in print, or on social media. If so, you've probably noticed that for the last year, the campaign has focused almost entirely on the soon-to-be implemented licensure examination. It's been a top priority of ours to make sure all current and aspiring RSWs and RCSWs are aware of these upcoming changes to the registration process.

BCCSW has also recently committed to stepping up our social media presence by posting regular news and updates pertinent to the social work profession. Follow us on Twitter at [@BCCSW\\_Regulator](https://twitter.com/BCCSW_Regulator) and like us on Facebook at [facebook.com/BCCollegeofSocialWorkers](https://facebook.com/BCCollegeofSocialWorkers) to stay in the loop.

*Some of our ads raising awareness for the September 1st implementation of the licensure exam:*



**It's getting close to that time again...**

*...when registered social workers throughout the land pause to reflect on their **professional development** goals and activities from the past year. Maybe you've already submitted your CPD (you keener, you); maybe you haven't even started; heck, maybe this is the first you're hearing about it. Whatever the case, we've compiled a **list of common questions** regarding CPD and answered them for your comfort and convenience (as well as our own).*

**Take a look >>>**

## Q: **WHAT IN TARNATION IS A CPD?**

**A:** **Continuing Professional Development** (CPD for short) is a self-directed program designed to help maintain and enhance the knowledge and competence of social work professionals throughout their careers. CPD runs on a yearly cycle that **begins on November 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on October 31<sup>st</sup>** (meaning the current cycle ends in almost two months). For every cycle, practicing registrants set **goals** aimed at improving their professional practice and undertake a minimum of **40 hours** of learning **activities** from a mixture of categories to fulfill these goals. After that, registrants write a reflective **statement on learning** in which they evaluate their gained insights from the program and the implications these learnings have for their professional practice. You can find a much more detailed explanation of the program on the dedicated [CPD page](#) of the BCCSW [website](#).

## Q: **DO I HAVE TO DO CPD?**

**A:** The short answer is **generally yes, but it depends**. If you are...

Registered and practicing: **yes\***

Registered and in the 'non-practicing' class: **no\*\***

No longer registered: **no**

\* This applies to all practicing registrants, whether full time, part time, casual etc.

\*\* Registrants in the 'non-practicing' class are not required to complete CPD for the cycle(s) during which they remain in the 'non-practicing' class. When transferring back into the 'full' class of registration, registrants' CPD requirements upon returning to practice will vary based on the length of time they were in the 'non-practicing' class. Those requirements can be found here and in the Bylaws. If a registrant spends less than one year in the 'non-practicing' class, the number of CPD hours they will be required to complete upon returning will be prorated based on when in the CPD cycle they return to the 'full' class.

## Q: **HOW DO I SUBMIT MY CPD?**

### A: **Submitting your CPD is simple:**

- ▶ Just **log in** to the member portal on the BCCSW website and click '**CPD**' on the left side of the screen.
- ▶ After that click '**Goals & Activities**' and begin by adding your first **goal**.
- ▶ Note that *two goals are already supplied*: 'Ethical Component' and 'Learning Plan'. The '**Ethical Component**' is a mandatory goal requiring you to complete a minimum of three hours of activities per CPD cycle pertaining to *ethical conduct*. The '**Learning Plan**' goal credits you with six hours of activities to account for the time spent on planning and documenting your goals and learning activities.
- ▶ Once you have inputted your goals, **activities** can be added to each goal, and hours logged for each activity. Note that there are six '**Categories of Activities**' which your activities can belong to. All of them except for 'Degree, diploma, certificate program or licensure exam'\* have a *maximum of 15 allowable hours*. This means that – unless you are a current student, new grad, or wrote the licensure exam during the CPD cycle – you will need activities from a minimum of three different categories to satisfy the program's requirements.  
\* See the previous question re. "Degree, diploma, certificate program or licensure exam"
- ▶ Once you have added all of your goals and subsequent activities, click '**Statement on Learning**' under 'CPD' on the left side of the screen. A window will open in which you will write a brief reflection your learning and its implications for your professional practice.
- ▶ When you are satisfied with your submission, click '**Submit to College**' to complete the process. You will be asked to click a box declaring the verity and compliance with the College's CPD Standards of your submission. If you are confident that your submission does indeed satisfy the terms of this declaration, tick the box, hit the final 'Submit' button and **Bob's your uncle**.

Too long? Summary: **log in > goals > activities > statement on learning > submit**

**Q: DOES MY SOCIAL WORK DEGREE PROGRAM COUNT FOR CPD HOURS? WHAT ABOUT THE LICENSURE EXAM?**

**A:** (Conditionally) **yes and yes.** If you were enrolled in classes as part of an academic degree, diploma, or certificate program with an accredited post-secondary institution during the CPD cycle, you may claim up to the *full 40 hours* for this activity. The same is true for the (soon-to-be-implemented) licensure examination: new registrants who complete the licensure examination will be able to claim the *full 40 hours* for the CPD cycle during which they write the exam. In both cases, registrants must add this activity under the goal titled 'Ethical Component' and select the category of learning, 'Degree, Diploma, Certificate Program, or Licensure Exam'.

**Q: IF I REGISTERED PART-WAY THROUGH THE CURRENT CPD CYCLE, ARE MY REQUIRED HOURS THE SAME?**

**A:** **Nope.** The required CPD hours for new registrants are **prorated** based on when in the CPD cycle you register. In the future this information will be displayed in the online CPD system, but at the moment it is not. New registrants can contact the College to find out what their required CPD hours are for the current cycle. Note that the hours required for the 'ethical component' of the program are *not prorated*, meaning all registrants must complete a minimum of three hours of activities pertaining to ethical conduct. The remaining 37 required hours will be prorated based on registration date.

**Q: IF I HAVE EXCESS HOURS FROM THE CURRENT CPD CYCLE, CAN I CARRY THEM OVER TO THE NEXT ONE?**

**A:** **No.** Well, not the hours themselves, but what you *can* do is continue with learning endeavours which you began in a previous CPD cycle. If, for example, you revisit materials or continue participating in a learning activity from a previous cycle, the hours spent on this within the current cycle can certainly be claimed for CPD.

**Q: I AM/WAS OFF FROM WORK FOR SOME/ALL OF THE CPD CYCLE BECAUSE OF HEALTH/FAMILY/PERSONAL/OTHER ISSUES. HOW DOES THIS AFFECT MY CPD?**

**A: One of the following options may be applicable in your situation:**

**Non-Practicing Declaration:** If you are not practicing social work due to health, personal or other issues, you can temporarily transfer into the ‘non-practicing’ class of registration. ‘Non-practicing’ registrants are not required to complete CPD for the cycle(s) during which they remain in the ‘non-practicing’ class. If a registrant is in the ‘non-practicing’ class for under a year, their CPD requirements upon returning to practice will be prorated based on when in the cycle they return to the ‘full’ class of registration. For registrants who remain in the ‘non-practicing’ class for over a year, CPD requirements upon returning to the ‘full’ class will vary depending on the length of time they were in the ‘non-practicing’ class. You can download the ‘Non-Practicing Declaration’ form [here](#).

**Special or Extraordinary Circumstances Claim:** If circumstances outside of your control have negatively affected, or could affect, your ability to complete your CPD requirements, you can explain your situation to the College by filling out the ‘Special or Extraordinary Circumstances’ form. Upon receipt of your claim, College staff will anonymize your information and bring it to the Quality Assurance Committee with appropriate recommendations – usually partial or complete waiver of the CPD requirements for that cycle. If you believe this applies to your situation, contact the College to briefly inform us of your circumstances and, if applicable, a member of the College staff will send you the form or recommend a suitable course of action.

**Q: IT WON'T LET ME SUBMIT MY CPD. WHAT'S UP WITH THAT?**

**A: Did you...**

- ▶ Ensure that you have at least **40** hours of activities?
- ▶ Ensure that you have at least **three** of the six Categories of Activities?
- ▶ Ensure you have *not exceeded the maximum allowable hours* for any of the six Categories of Activities?\*
- ▶ Ensure that you have completed at least **three** hours of activities under the 'Ethical Component' goal?
- ▶ Entered and saved a 'Statement on Learning'?
- ▶ Submit all of your activities *within* the specific goals they relate to?\*\*\*

\* Submitting more than the allowable hours for a given category is not an issue in and of itself, but registrants must complete at least 40 *allowable* hours to satisfy the program's requirements.

\*\* It is a common occurrence for registrants to accidentally submit all of their activities under a single goal, either because they have mistaken the activities for goals, they have not yet added goals with the 'Add Goal' button, or for some other reason. Ensure you are adding goals properly by following this sequence:

**CPD > Goals & Activities > Add Goal** (upper left part of the screen).

**Q: WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T SUBMIT MY CPD ON TIME?**

**A: You will be banished to the coldest part of Manitoba** (just kidding).

- ▶ On **November 1st**, if your CPD has not been received, your registration status with the College will automatically change from 'Good Standing' to 'Not in Good Standing- CPD'.
- ▶ From that point, you have until **January 31st** to submit overdue CPD requirements without incurring additional cost.
- ▶ After January 31st you will need to submit outstanding CPD requirements and as well as pay a **re-instatement fee** to the College in order to return to 'Good Standing'.
- ▶ On **May 1st**, any registrants with outstanding CPD requirements will have their registrations **closed** and will need to re-apply - *which will include taking the licensure examination.*

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*This is by no means an exhaustive list of the questions we frequently get asked about CPD - just a handful of popular inquiries from the last month or so. There is a plethora of information about the program available through the CPD page on the College's website, including...*

- ▶ [The CPD Manual](#)
- ▶ [A explanation of the Categories of Activities](#)
- ▶ [A sample submission](#)
- ▶ [More FAQs](#)
- ▶ + lots more juicy details

*As always, if you're unable to find answers to your questions online, send an email to the CPD support account ([cpdsupport@bccsw.ca](mailto:cpdsupport@bccsw.ca)) or give the office a ring and we will be happy to assist you.*

# REFLECTING ON MY TIME AT THE COLLEGE

by M A K H A N S H E R G I L L



**Joining the College** as Director of Professional Practice in January 2013 coincided with my first introduction to Canadian social work. Having lived in the UK prior to this, and working as a social worker since 1990, many things were a revelation to me in the early days of my initiation to the Canadian way. I remember on the one hand being overwhelmed as I tried to digest the stark differences between social work in Canada and the UK, and on the other, re-assured by the commonalities in the shared pursuit of social justice and the well-being of marginalised people.

Having worked as a social work educator for 15 years prior to arriving on these shores, I remember feeling an initial sense of liberation by the absence of any regulatory oversight on the BC Schools of Social Work. This means that Schools have authority to deliver programs underpinned by their own unique philosophical and theoretical stances, unified around critical social work perspectives. Despite Schools adhering to broad accreditation standards, it did later make me wonder how this autonomy to deliver programs, primarily focused on developing graduates' capacities for criticality, also ensured that they were ready with the necessary practice skills for the workplace.

I was rather surprised that the organization of Canadian social work was so heavily located within the health sector and aghast that a newly qualified social worker could set up a private practice with little or no professional experience. One day, I found myself completely dumbstruck on learning that some social workers; those working with the most vulnerable populations were exempt from registration!

My emotional life was in turmoil to say the least, and it wasn't getting better. I felt heartbroken as I began to learn about the plight of aboriginal children trapped in a dysfunctional child welfare system, and later dismayed by the hidden levels of poverty in the Province.

Whilst I yearned in those early days for a return back to the security and familiarity of what I had known in the UK, I began to reflect that not all was well back 'home'. Although I was relieved that all UK social workers were held accountable through regulation, and social work programs were more balanced in regard to the theory and practice nexus, I realised that the profession of UK social work over the past 15 years had dramatically shifted its focus. It currently is concerned with working with higher thresholds of risk i.e. child welfare and adult mental health, and has drifted away from its traditional role of also working with those affected by broader social and financial hardship. As the majority of UK social work is undertaken within the statutory sector, I realised that the politicization of social work in the UK, following successive child death inquiries and adult care scandals had led to increasing government intervention in the profession through a rapid churn of policy initiatives. This has resulted in a re-shaping of social work towards a technological activity driven by managerialism which privileges economic concerns over need, and proceduralization. On the frontline, this translates to social workers spending more time completing paperwork rather than engaging with clients, and acting as gatekeepers in administering limited resources to meet human need.

The emergent neoliberal political paradigm that has taken hold since the late 1970's has significantly impacted UK social work by creating a heavily bureaucratized social care system within which the very nature of social work is currently being fiercely contested. Just before I boarded the plane to head to the New Land in 2013, there was a watershed moment in UK social work: the government finally conceded, following an independent review of children's social work, that 'the system had completely broken'. Consequently, a major overhaul of practice and the practice system was promised. This lit a glimmer of hope which was instantly extinguished as the flight attendant announced, 'the captain has turned on the fasten seatbelt sign and the flight is ready for take-off'.

Since arriving at the College, I have begun to understand and embrace the essence of Canadian social work. However, I see some of the same forces and trajectories

I have witnessed in the UK beginning to influence and emerge in Canadian social work, some for the better and some which will be to the profession's detriment if left unchallenged.

My time at the College has been professionally rewarding and I have had the opportunity to work with creative colleagues on many exciting initiatives including an innovative professional development program; developing transparent and fair policies and procedures for registration; ushering in the licensure exam; supporting the removal of exemptions and the current work on overhauling the Standards of Practice. These initiatives and developments, in my mind, place the BC College of Social Workers at the forefront of progressive regulation in Canada.

The College has a committed Registrar and dedicated staff, and is anchored by the selfless time and expertise provided by its Board and Committee members. I have come to understand that self-regulation of a profession is indeed a privilege and like many things in life, the value of something is only truly appreciated once it has been lost.

The College is rapidly growing and will need to forge stronger alliances and partnerships with all stakeholders as it evolves. Key in these relationships is the development of respectful dialogue with aboriginal communities and social workers. Additionally, stronger relations with Schools of Social Work and the Association are essential, if social work education, regulation and service delivery in BC is to develop in a coherent, relevant and joined-up manner.

My final reflection, as I pack my bags (and umbrella!) to return to an uncertain rainy social work terrain in the UK, is that whilst social work in BC faces many challenges which over time will become more overt, it is much more assured and grounded in its tradition given the changing political, social and economic environment within which the profession exists. Through the collective wisdom and commitment of all those working in the profession, not least those registrants on the frontline, the profession of social work in the Province has the capacity and strength to meet these challenges head on!

*(Makhan was employed as a Director of Professional Practice between January 2013 and August 2015)*



**The Canadian Association** of Social Workers offered a webinar in the spring of 2015 titled “Negligence and Documentation for Social Workers”. The presenter, Dr. Robert Soloman, unpacked the concept of ‘negligence’ and distinguished it from concepts of ‘errors in judgement’ and ‘incompetence’. He also reviewed the basic principles of common law which govern documentation and general guidelines for record keeping. Finally, he touched on a common dilemma among social workers: the inclusion of third party information in client records. In this article I will share some helpful information from the webinar and discuss its implications for practice from a regulatory perspective.

If you have ever called the College for consultation regarding a practice dilemma, you will have likely heard during that conversation the phrase, “act in the best interest of the client”. This means that, if you are acting in good faith by putting the legitimate needs of the client first, which itself requires some professional judgement and interpretation of the presenting issues, you would be acting in accordance with professional ethical obligations and *Standards of Practice*. If your actions end up being questioned in some capacity, the basis for evaluating said actions would be whether or not you had acted *reasonably*. Generally, the test for reasonableness is to question whether a peer professional would expect this behaviour or conduct themselves in a similar manner. In other words, would a group of your peers determine your action to be appropriate, ordinary, or usual given the circumstances? It does not necessarily mean that your action was correct

or resulted in the outcomes expected or hoped for, but that with the information you had at hand at the time, you made a fair and reasonable attempt to work in the client's best interest.

In contrast, a social worker could be held liable if they *knew they were not capable or competent but acted anyways* without due consideration. "Incompetence" is defined as an inability or failure to meet and comply with the standards expected of a professional. The College bylaws further define 'incompetence' as "a lack of knowledge, skill, or judgment, or disregard for the welfare of a client or the public of such nature or extent as to demonstrate that the registrant is unfit to carry out one or more of the responsibilities of a registrant" (Bylaw 61(2)). For example, if a social worker without training or experience working with people with mental health issues were to independently diagnose and treat someone with borderline personality disorder, the social worker would be subject to an investigation by the College and possible discipline, as well as a possible civil suit.

Woven throughout all of this is the importance of *documentation*. Among other things, clear record keeping can demonstrate how your decision making process was oriented toward the best interest of the client, as well as allow you and your peers to provide ongoing effective care to that client. Records may also be called into question in any investigative proceeding, whether within the College's complaint process or as part of a court case. Client records should, among other things, reflect your honest impression of the client and include any information you have that is relevant to the care of the client. Generally, the level of detail that you include in a record should reflect the number and seriousness of a client's issues. In other words, the more serious the issue, the more detail you should include. Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule which this article will not touch on. You may also include a statement of opinion, as long as it is not presented as factual and whatever you have opined is consistent with your training, education, qualifications, and experience. This relates back to working within your level of competence or areas of experience and knowledge.

I recently received a call from a registrant inquiring about the inclusion of information in a client's record that was either acquired from or pertains to another party besides the client. This can present as an ethical dilemma. Firstly, if you are wondering whether you should include information *about* a third party in a client's file, consider its relevance to the client's care. If it is your professional opinion that the information is relevant and it can be properly attributed, then

include it accurately in the client record. In the event you should fail to record information which ends up being relevant, it could not only result in potential harm to the client, but could also pose challenges for you in providing services to the client, as well as possibly obstruct future legal proceedings. Use the analogy of a family physician keeping a record for a patient with a family history of heart disease. If a patient's father and uncle both died of heart failure and the physician failed to record this in the patient's chart, the physician could miss important signs or symptoms of heart failure which the patient might be presenting and could mistreat them as a result. You can probably imagine the risks and potential harms posed by such a misstep.

Secondly, if you are wondering whether you should include information *from* a third party in your client's file, consider whether you could instead obtain this information from the client themselves. If information relevant to the client would be useful to the client's care, but the information is not available from, or would not necessarily be accurate if accessed from the client, then it may be appropriate to obtain it from a third party. For example, if you are working with an elderly person who has advanced dementia and you obtain information about their care needs from an adult offspring who is actively involved in their life, it would be appropriate to include this in the client's record.

In some aspects, Canada appears to be growing increasingly litigious. This introduces new fears to our society - fears which can lead to inaction. With that in mind, we must remember that the *failure to act* can also be seen as negligence. Therefore, always proceed within reason and in good faith; consult along the way; refer to another professional if needed; and refer also to the many tools in your toolbox, which include legislation, ethical decision making guidelines, policies and the *Standards of Practice*.

# A PATH TO PRIVATE PRACTICE

by C H E L S E A C O O L E D G E



**The thought of having** one's own private practice can be very inviting for those who seek autonomy and flexibility in their schedules; however it's a path that also requires a great deal of hard work and dedication. There are number of factors to consider when opening a private practice and in making it a successful and safe business venture.

First, the BCCSW Bylaw 68 states that for private practice, registrants must ensure they are insured against liability for at least \$1,000,000. Although the bylaws do not mention what qualifications a registered social worker requires, it is recommended that the social work evaluate their own level of competence, readiness and skills. Comparatively, in the US, generally one must have a master's degree in social work and a minimum of two years post-graduate experience in a supervised setting before they are considered qualified to work in a private practice setting. It may be worthwhile considering joining an existing and established private practice with peer registrants to get a better sense of what all is involved before venturing out on your own.

Consider the following:

## Ethics

- If you have a private practice in addition to a job with an employer, reflect on how you would handle a situation where a client from your employer asked to also see you in your private practice setting. What would you do? In the alternative what would you do when your private practice client shows up in the cancer clinic where you are employed as a counsellor? What would you tell your employer?
- When you are an independent practitioner, you can also be very isolated. You don't have a peer or a more seasoned practitioner immediately available for consultation. How have you prepared for a crisis situation in which you are unfamiliar?
- How do you maintain confidentiality? What would you do if you were accused of violating boundaries with your client? Would you be able to demonstrate that you maintained professional integrity and boundaries?
- Do you have a safety plan for yourself in case you are faced with an aggressive client or an aggressive family member of a client? How do you keep yourself and your client safe in the event of a natural disaster? How will you handle unplanned absences from your practice?

Although we can't possibly predict every dilemma we may face in a private practice setting, it is recommended that you thoroughly reflect on these types of situations because even if you have a plan, are familiar with any legal requirements, and have reviewed the *Standards of Practice*, a plan of action would put you in a better situation to deal with such events.

## Business Acumen

- Where will your business be located? Is it in your home? Are you renting a suite in a building with other businesses? Are you sharing an office? Do you have the appropriate licenses and insurances? Do you have a business license?
- How are you ensuring your records are locked and secured? If your business is in your home, how do you ensure the safety of your family and the safety and confidentiality of your clients?

- Do you have liability insurance? Are you going to become incorporated? How do you file income taxes and pay GST? How will you maintain accounting records?
- How will you market your business and attain clients? Where will you advertise? How will you receive referrals? Are you familiar with the College Bylaws on marketing?
- What fees will you charge and how will you collect them? How will you organize and track your finances? How will you deal with cancellations and no-shows?
- How will you keep the administrative aspects of your business organized?
- Is your business incorporated? Do you have shareholders?
- Do you have a secure email address, and telephone line? Will you have a website? What will be the content of the website and will it comply with by-laws and legislation?
- Do you have a business license?
- How many clients do you need to see in order to meet your salary expectations? How much income do you need to generate?
- Do you have a financial contingency plan in the event that you are subpoenaed to court or unable to practice due to another unexpected event? Not only will you be losing income from time away from clients, but you may also have associated expenses for legal fees or other costs.

Having a private practice is not only about providing counselling but it requires the operation of a business. It is advisable to consult a lawyer, accountant, insurance agent, a business management company or other such professionals when starting a business. You may also want to consider taking a business management course or workshop to develop the skills for operating a business.

When setting your fees, you may want to consider your geographical location, the target population of your client base, and the fees of other registered social workers in private practice in your area. The College does not advise or set a fee schedule for social workers in private practice. Decide on an amount that is fair, ethical and reasonable.

There will be times when business is good, you have many clients booked and the income is steadily coming in. There will be other times when things are slow and

your income will be significantly less. Have you planned for these discrepancies?

## Records and Forms

- Do you have consent forms for your clients to sign to obtain your services? What have you included on this consent form? If you are counselling multiple members of one family, will you have them each sign a separate consent form?
- If you are providing counselling to a couple, will you keep separate records for each member?
- Will you provide counselling to children? How will you obtain consent from children? If you are providing counselling services to children, how will you manage parents who are in conflict? What happens if one parent consents to their child receiving treatment but not the other parent? What will you do if one of the parents requests a copy of their child's records? Would you release it? To one parent or both?
- What would you do if a lawyer requested a copy of your records? What if the police had questions for you related to one of your clients?
- How will you safely and securely store and maintain your records? What format would you follow to allow the release of client records?
- What happens to your clients and your records if you become incapacitated unexpectedly? Will you have a professional will?
- If you are in private practice with other registered practitioners, do you have office policies to define procedures and practices for such circumstances?

There can be many challenges when dealing with people in crisis or conflict but the rewards of practice far outweigh any sticky situation that you may come across. This article is not meant to frighten you away from entering into private practice but is simply meant to help you reflect on the complexities involved; not only for the safety of your clients but also your own well-being. Starting a private practice requires a strong business plan and an ability to market yourself but you must also have a strong and varied support system. And remember to take care of yourself. A healthy work-life balance is important in any job but is especially relevant when you have your own business.

**The BC Ministry of Health** recently published a series of reports signalling changes to the structure and delivery of healthcare in the province. The proposed reforms, some of which are currently in progress, will move BC’s healthcare system toward a more client-centred, multidisciplinary, team-based model of care and service administration. This could include amending the role and status of walk-in clinics, reviewing the concept of patient attachment, and transitioning towards a greater proliferation of team-based family practices as opposed to traditional, owner-operated medical centres.

One report titled “Primary and Community Care (including Residential Care)” emphasizes the need to co-ordinate the different aspects of primary, community, and social care within a comprehensive and integrated framework. A separate paper published by the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences reaches a similar conclusion: that only an innovative, patient-focused, collaborative model of care which revisits healthcare professionals’ scopes of practice can successfully circumvent the structural barriers preventing some groups from receiving optimal care. Increased and more flexible delivery of services to older adults with complex health issues and to populations in rural or remote communities were of particular salience in the Ministry’s reports, as was the need for improving timely access to surgical treatments and procedures.

The aforementioned paper on primary and community care also alludes to the potential for a semi-private or tiered system of primary care delivery in BC: “There is the opportunity to continue to expand this approach away from traditional MSP fee setting as well as take steps to realize increased options for compensation models that include salaried, contractual, and population need based approaches,” the report says.

What do you think about this proposed direction for the future of healthcare in BC? The Ministry is seeking feedback from healthcare and social service providers as part of a “healthy and thoughtful discussion of these recommendations”.

Get in touch with them online at <https://extranet.gov.bc.ca/forms/gov/contact>

# STANDARDS OF PRACTICE: UPDATE ON THE REVISIONS

by M A K H A N S H E R G I L L

**Work continues** at a steady pace on the revision of the *Standards of Practice*. Staff have been working with a group of registrants selected to represent the various scopes of practice in BC. This reference group has been charged with providing critical perspectives from the front-line so that the revision work is informed by the realities of practice delivery. We are particularly keen for this reference group to also inform the College's work on the *Standards* from their individual practice constituencies which include rural, remote and urban practice locations. This comprehensive revision of the standards is directed and overseen by the Quality Assurance Committee.

The aim of revising the current *Standards of Practice* is to develop a new set of standards that better describe safe, effective and ethical professional social work practice in BC to registrants and to the public. The *Standards* will thus fulfill the College's primary mandate of public protection by clearly articulating the threshold competencies and obligations that registrants have in delivering professional social work services to the public.

Working within the [Guiding Framework](#), staff with the assistance of the reference group are currently attempting to identify the common components of practice that are relevant to all scopes of practice in BC. These scopes of practice include direct practice, clinical social work, community development, social policy practice, education & training, research, management & leadership and administration. As part of this initial work, the College is also examining international models and best practices in social work standards so that BC continues to lead progressive and evolving regulation across Canada.

Once these common components of practice have been identified, the College will begin consulting widely with its registrant population by providing accessible means for registrants to make meaningful contributions to the revision of the standards work as it evolves.

# QUALIFIED HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS & THE GUARDIANSHIP OF THE ADULT ACT

by C H E L S E A C O O L E D G E

The BC Ombudsperson investigated the **Certificate of Incapability** process under the *Patients Property Act*, and the findings from this investigation were compiled in the February 2013 report, “[No Longer Your Decision: British Columbia’s Process for Appointing the Public Guardian and Trustee to Manage the Financial Affairs of Incapable Adults](#)”. In the report, the Ombudsperson made 28 recommendations directed at health authorities, the Public Guardian and Trustee of BC, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Health to enhance the fairness of the process for issuing certificates of incapability. Many of the recommended changes were later brought into effect on December 1, 2014 under Part 2.1 of the *Adult Guardianship Act* and the *Statutory Property Guardianship Regulation*. The *Regulation* sets out which health care providers are qualified to conduct the functional component of the assessment to determine incapability for managing financial affairs. It also calls upon the regulatory bodies of these health care professions to establish Standards, Limits and Conditions for registrants who will be acting as qualified health care providers under this regulation. The BC College of Social Workers has developed these Standards, Limits and Conditions, which can be found on our [website](#).

Registered social workers, who may, in the course of their employment, conduct financial incapability assessments must comply with these Standards, Limits and Conditions, which stipulate the mandatory completion of an **online course**. Employees of Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, Providence Health Services Authority, Island Health Authority, Interior Health Authority and Fraser Health Authority can access the course through their health authority’s learning management system. Non-health authority-employed registrants may take the course through the [PHSA learning hub](#). To ensure the safe implementation of this new regulation, successful completion of the course is now required *prior* to conducting the functional component of an assessment to determine financial incapability.

If you have completed the online course, mail or scan/email a copy of your certificate of completion to the College and we will update your qualifications in our registry.



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We would also like to wholeheartedly thank all of the College's departing Board members, including the Board's *first ever* Chair, **Liz Jones**, and long-time Public Member **Bruce Hallsor**. THANK YOU for your hard work and commitment to cultivating and maintaining excellence in the Social Work profession.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY CREDITS**

### **GUEST PHOTOGRAPHY**

Front cover image - photographer: **Byron Dauncey**

Staff portraits of Makhan Shergill, Hoon Kim & Nigel Mojica - photographer: **Chelsea Cooledge**

### **CREATIVE COMMONS IMAGES**

Table of Contents image - *Solander Island*, photographer: **Ryan Padriac**

p. 3 image - *Rainbow Trail*, photographer: **Jennifer C.**

p. 6 image - *Alouette Lake at Sunrise*, photographer: **Jerry Meaden**

pp. 23, 26 image - *Vancouver Island - Pacific Rim*, photographer: **Kevin M. Klerks**

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