



Practice Notes:

The Standards of Practice and the Continuing Competence Program – What is Their Relationship?

Pamela Blake, M.S.W., RSW, Deputy Registrar

Practice Notes is an educational tool to help Ontario social workers, social service workers, employers and members of the public gain a better understanding of issues dealt with by the College's Professional Practice Department and Complaints Committee, as well as issues that affect members' everyday practice. The notes offer general guidance only and members with specific inquiries should consult the College, since the relevant standards and appropriate course of action will vary depending on the situation.

Requirements of Membership in the College

As members will know, the Standards of Practice have been approved in a bylaw of the College and hence, all members of the College are obliged to practise in accordance with them. Likewise, on the authority of the Registration Regulation made under the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, all members of the College are required to participate in the Continuing Competence Program (CCP). The initial step in the Continuing Competence Program calls for members to conduct an annual review of their practice using the self-assessment tool, which is based on the standards of practice. The standards of practice contain eight Principles and their corresponding interpretations.

We learned through the CCP consultation that members had some difficulty identifying learning goals and objectives for a number of the Principles. While identifying learning goals related to Principle II, Competence and Integrity appears to be well understood, relating learning goals to some of the other Principles is not. Some incorrectly concluded that some of the Principles were not relevant to their practice. The goal of these Practice Notes is to assist members in broadening their understanding of all eight Principles and how their learning goals can be linked. Once learning goals have been identified, related learning objectives that are SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and

timely) will be established, and from there, determining what learning activities the member will engage in to meet their learning objectives. However, this article will address only the initial - and critical - issue of understanding the breadth of the standards of practice and how they may be related to learning goals.

Linking Professional Responsibilities with the Standards of Practice to Identify Learning Goals

Before completing the self-assessment tool, it may be useful to think about your current professional responsibilities, and any anticipated new tasks or responsibilities. You may also wish to consult with a peer or colleague for feedback or ideas. It may also help to consider practice dilemmas that you have encountered. For example:

A social worker employed by a community-based counselling agency is informed by her manager that according to a new policy adopted by the Board, clients will be offered a maximum of 12 sessions after which the case must be closed. This is a departure from previous practice which offered an unlimited number of sessions. She is angry about the policy and concerned about the impact on her clients.

She reviews the standards of practice as the first step in completing the self-assessment tool, keeping this dilemma in mind. She finds that a number of the Principles and their interpretations are relevant:

Principle I, Relationship with Clients

1.1 College members and clients participate together in setting and evaluating goals. A purpose for the relationship between College members and clients is identified.

1.5 College members are aware of their values,

attitudes and needs and how these impact on their professional relationships with clients.

1.6 College members distinguish their needs and interests from those of their clients to ensure that, within professional relationships, clients' needs and interests remain paramount.

1.7.1 College members employed by organizations maintain an awareness and consideration of the purpose, mandate and function of those organizations and how these impact on and limit professional relationships with clients.

Principle II, Competence and Integrity

2.1.2 College members remain current with emerging social work or social service work knowledge and practice relevant to their areas of professional practice. Members demonstrate their commitment to ongoing professional development by engaging in any continuing education and complying with continuing competence measures required by the College.

2.1.3 College members maintain current knowledge of policies, legislation, programs and issues related to the community, its institutions and services in their areas of practice.

2.2.9 College members assist clients to access necessary information, services and resources wherever possible.

Principle III, Responsibility to Clients

3.1 College members provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature, and limitations of any services available to them.

3.6.1 College members inform clients of foreseeable risks as well as rights, opportunities, and obligations associated with the provision of professional services.

3.11 Where appropriate, College members advocate for and/or with clients and inform clients of any action taken and its outcome. Members adhere to Principle V Confidentiality of this Standards of Practice Handbook when providing advocacy services.⁶

Though there are likely additional interpretations that are relevant to the social worker's dilemma, the aforementioned assist her in clarifying her goal. She determines that her overall goal will be to work within the new agency requirements to maximize her effectiveness with clients. Her objectives, which she will articulate according to the SMART format, will include ensuring that her own negative feelings will not impact her clients, ascertaining what skills she will need to change her

clinical work to a time limited framework, informing clients of the new parameters of the services, becoming familiar with other resources that her clients may access and finally, considering how and when she might advocate for a client to receive additional services in her agency.

Principle VII, Advertising

Many members incorrectly conclude that Principle VII, Advertising pertains only to members in private practice. Consider the following:

A social service worker secures a new position in a community centre in which she will be offering social groups to single mothers. She will need business cards to introduce herself to potential referral sources and to design a flyer to recruit group members.

Principle VII provides guidelines to ensure that advertisements are compatible with the standards and ethics of the social work and social service work professions. Footnote 1 provides direction about acceptable forms for individual designation on business cards and other business related materials. Although this Principle should be reviewed in its entirety, it states in part:

The following alternatives are acceptable forms for individual vocational designation on business cards, letterhead stationery, forms, business telephone listings, directories, signs and identification of business premises, etc.:

- a) College members who are social workers identify themselves by using the designation "RSW" following their names. College members who are social service workers identify themselves by using the designation "RSSW" following their names. College members may add an optional one line description of the College member's area of limited practice or specialty; or
- b) "RSW", in the case of a social worker, or "RSSW", in the case of a social service worker, following the highest academic degree or diploma;

The social service worker uses Principle VII to set her goals in regard to developing advertisements for the groups she plans to offer, as well as printing her new business cards.

Principle VIII, Sexual Misconduct

A number of members who participated in the consultation expressed their confidence that they would not need to identify a learning goal related to Principle VIII, Sexual Misconduct as they are clear about their boundaries with

clients and would not cross these. However, a closer look at this principle may lead members to identify relevant goals. For example:

A social worker on a multidisciplinary team has been asked to provide information about sexual abuse of clients for the development of a workplace policy and procedures manual. Specifically, he and his colleagues from nursing and occupational therapy have been asked to provide information about their respective regulatory requirements in regard to: How is sexual abuse defined? Is there a minimum period of time before a social worker may establish a sexual relationship with a former client? What obligations does a social worker have if he/she learns that another professional has had a sexual relationship with a client or former client?

In reviewing Principle VIII the social worker discovers that there is information that will help him address his original goals, that is to address the issues raised on his team, as well as assist him in broadening his learning objectives in regard to behaviour of a sexual nature in a client relationship.

Conclusion

Before completing the self-assessment tool, the first step in the new Continuing Competence Program, members may wish to review their current professional responsibilities as well as anticipated new tasks or responsibilities and to consult with a peer or colleague. It may also be helpful to consider any practice dilemmas or challenges they have encountered, keeping these in mind as they review the standards of practice. Although members are not required to identify a goal for each of the eight Principles in the standards of practice, due consideration should be given to how these principles may link with their practice issues. From this point, members will then be able to move on to develop their SMART learning objectives – that is, objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely – and determine the learning activities they will engage in to meet their learning objectives.

For more information about the Continuing Competence Program, please visit the website www.ocswssw.org or contact the College's Professional Practice Department.