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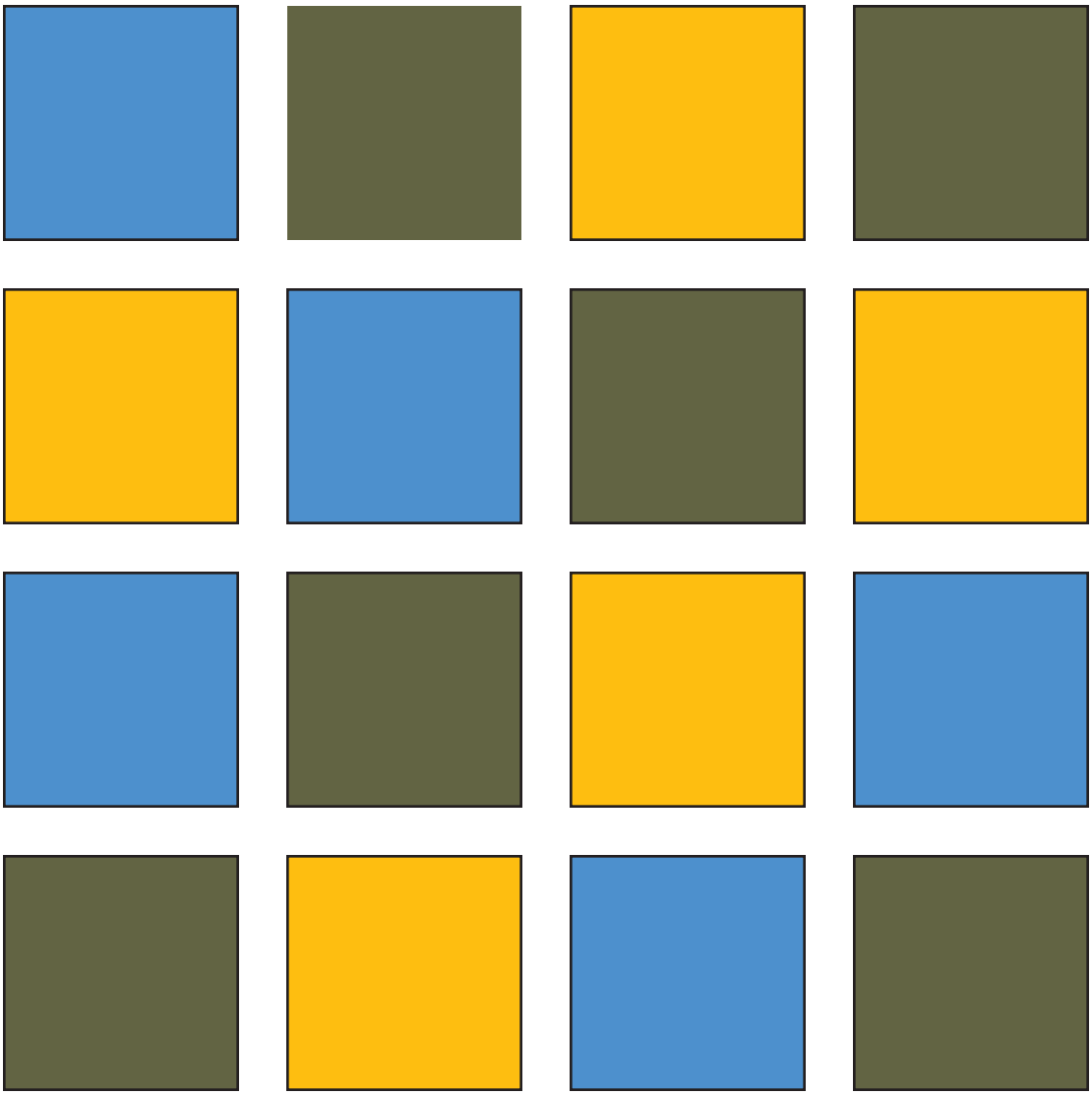

BC CSW

British Columbia College of Social Workers

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BCCSW
British Columbia College of Social Workers

Musing on Mandatory Registration and the Regulation of Social Work

Liz Jones
Chair, BCCSW Board of Directors

I have recently been in a number of conversations about the removal of the exemption of health care workers from the *Social Workers Act*. I've been surprised by some negative reactions, although most have been positive. These reactions caused me to think more about the profession of social work itself and why mandatory registration still might be a mystery to many in the field.

The History

In 1968, the Board of Registration for Social Workers and the British Columbia Association of Social Workers were born through the proclamation of the first *Social Workers Act*. At that point, the two organizations were one, with a regulatory arm (the Board of Registration), and an advocacy arm (the Association). A social worker could not be a member of one without being a member of the other. The organizations were formed with a view to developing a framework for the regulation of social work through the adherence to legislation and advocating for the advancement of the profession. Even in those early days, full mandatory registration for all social workers in the province was the vision of both organizations. This vision has never varied through many executive directors, registrars, and board members of the Board of Registration and the current College of Social Workers. There have been many strong advocates for mandatory registration through the years. Derek Thompson, Barbara Brett, Chris Walmsley, Stuart Alcock, Gail Storey, Susan Irwin, Linda Korbin,

and Margaret Duncan are names from the past that come immediately to mind. In 1995, the Board of Registration decided, based on legal opinion and initiatives in the regulatory world, to separate from the Association. For those of us who were around at that time, it was very challenging and turbulent. I was chair of the BCASW Board then and know firsthand the impact on the Association. Since then, the Association continued its work of advocacy and the Board of Registration became the BC College of Social Workers in 2008, with a new, improved, *Social Workers Act*. This *Act* has taken the College a long way forward in becoming a viable and strong regulatory body.

The Present Day

The *Social Workers Act* does not confer full, mandatory regulation and registration to our profession. Why, you might ask? Some reasons, although not exhaustive, might be because of the grassroots beginnings of the profession; the sense of 'elitism' that the word profession might produce; the involvement of unions; our unease with our power; and the will of government. Until October 31 of this year, we had five exemptions to mandatory registration identified in the *Act*. They were: social workers employed by government, aboriginal bands and agencies, and certain types of other agencies. The removal of the health care exemption made it mandatory that all social workers in health care must be registered. We continue to work on removing the other four.

Why do we want a regulatory framework and mandatory registration?

The primary question: is social work a profession? A profession is defined as: A vocation founded upon specialized educational training, the purpose of which is to supply objective counsel and service to others, for a direct and definite compensation, wholly apart from expectation of gain. Historically, there were only three: divinity, medicine, law. In most of the developed world, governments have determined that professions who serve the public can do harm and therefore must be regulated. Governments decide on the framework for regulation; sometimes with input from the identified profession, sometimes not. This framework is embedded in legislation and charged to some kind of entity, often in the western world called an Association or College or regulatory organization.

Markers and milestones associated with the development of a profession are:

- First training school was established
- First university school was established
- First local association was established
- First national association was established
- Codes of professional ethics were introduced
- Licensing laws were established.

Characteristics of a profession:

- Professional association
- Cognitive base
- Institutionalized training
- Licensing/regulation
- Work autonomy
- Colleague control
- Code of ethics
- High standards of professional and intellectual excellence
- Power and privilege.

With a complete regulatory framework and mandatory registration, all people who meet the registration criteria to call themselves a social worker (at present that is a BSW in BC) must register with the College and can use that title. It would mean no one else could. It would mean that the public would be assured of regulatory

oversight for protection of harm and could lay a complaint if they felt aggrieved.

Every other health profession in BC requires registration and regulation. Imagine a medical doctor without credentials calling themself a physician; or a physical therapist; or a midwife; or a nurse...the list goes on. Those familiar with news in Vancouver will be aware of a person illegally practising dentistry and the risk of harm to the members of the public who attended for treatment. We know, however, that many people call themselves social workers and practise as social workers and they do so even when they do not meet requirements for registration. They do so because of the exemptions.

"the same Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice"

I don't believe our vision is an exclusionary exercise nor is it to ignore overlapping scopes of practice. It is inclusionary to the extent that we are focusing on trained and registered social workers calling ourselves social workers; identifying with the same Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, levels of competency, and submitting to a level of oversight beyond our employers.

The vision from almost 60 years continues to burn brightly for our two social work organizations and for many social workers around the province. The initiatives that emanate from the College are in pursuit of this vision, for instance: removal of the exemptions, the development of an entry exam, our current communications campaign, among others. We social workers, along with universities and employers need to be 'in sync' with each other, so that we can pursue and achieve this vision together. We are a profession!

A Year of Progress

John Mayr
Registrar

It is hard to believe that it is already December. Given that, some reflection on the year is appropriate. We began 2013 with significant challenges related to the College's database. Just prior to registration renewals, the company that hosted our database experienced significant technical difficulties. The database, including the registrant portal, was inaccessible for two weeks. Even after the hosting company gave the all clear, we continued to experience significant problems. The email address that is the sender for new passwords was identified as sending spam. This meant that the vast majority of people requesting a new password never saw that they received a response. While this resulted in staff directly responding to approximately 1300 emails, we were thankfully able to complete the online registration renewals on time.

Given the issues we faced, the decision was made to relocate the entire database and move away from a "cloud-based" storage system. This move gave us the opportunity to make some much needed changes to the registrant portal. For example, the previous system did not work with new browsers, Mac computers, tablets, or other handheld devices. The office responded to a significant number of calls from users of these electronics, so we are happy to report that the updated registrant portal now has full functionality with these newer devices. As Sir Isaac Newton postulated in his third law of motion, 'for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction', there are now some issues

"for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction"

with registrants' devices that still run on old and outdated programs that we are having to contend with as a result!

While on the topic of renewals and computers, please take the time to read the preamble to the online registration system. There is important information for users trying to access the system from certain workplaces like a health authority or some government offices.

The deadline for renewal is January 31, 2014. After this date, there is a significant reinstatement fee of 35% applicable in addition to the renewal fee. I have made it my personal goal to eliminate revenue from reinstatement fees. We do this by communicating early and often with registrants who have not yet renewed. Please let us know if you are thinking about not renewing. When we are made aware that a registrant is intending not to renew their registration, we stop sending renewal and reinstatement notices.

While registrations and renewals are the main activities of this College, 2013 was particularly busy with the removal of the exemption for social workers employed by health authorities. On or before September 1, 2013, social workers employed by health authorities in social work positions were required to register. The amendment to the regulation resulted in the regulation of an additional 350 social workers. The amendment also implements the title protection part of the Social Workers Act for social workers in health. This means that only a registrant of the College can use the title Social Worker, Registered Social Worker, Registered Clinical Social Worker, or Clinical Social Worker if they are employed by a health authority. If you are aware that an individual is using one of these protected titles without being registered, you are encouraged to contact the College anonymously.

During 2013, the College also embarked on a significant public awareness campaign. Our campaign started with notices intended to increase the public's awareness of the College of Social Workers and the valuable services that social workers provide. The campaign also aims to raise awareness among the public that non-regulated persons can offer similar services and the difference between regulated and registered professionals in terms of public safety.

Finally, this newsletter contains a great deal of content and information about the College's Quality Assurance initiative – the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. Since the launch of the CPD program on November 1, we have responded to quite a number of registrants' queries. We will continue to provide advice and information to our registrants to support the implementation of this exciting new initiative. For the most part, the new CPD program has been well received. The program continues the requirement that was in place under the Board of Registration (the predecessor to the College), and parallels programs that exist in the rest of Canada. I would like to take this opportunity to address some of the misconceptions that staff have clarified about the program since its launch.

- The intent of the program is for registrants to engage in meaningful professional development with the objective of enhancing practice; not just complete a number of hours of activities. Therefore the program has been designed to incorporate a broad range of professional learning activities including self-directed, work-based, and professional activity learning.
- Registrants can take formal courses as part of the 40-hour requirement, if they choose, but there is no requirement to take such formal courses. The College considered the financial implications of prescribing such a requirement and designed the CPD program in a manner that the full requirements can be met without a registrant having to be burdened by either the financial or time costs of engaging in paid courses.
- The program relies on a model of reflective learning and reflective practice and is flexible in considering ongoing professional development throughout a professional's 'life cycle'. A newly graduated registrant will have very different learning needs and development goals than a seasoned social worker. Similarly, a social worker with deep experience working with communities who subsequently moves to a position in mental health will have a unique series of professional development needs in order to support their transition to this new scope of practice.
- It is important to consider the requirements of the CPD program in the context of employer appraisal mechanisms, if relevant. Your CPD learning goals can be aligned and satisfied as part of your annual requirements for development as part of your employment or what is required by your agency for your professional development. Most registrants we

have spoken to, once having had the opportunity to review the CPD documents, inform us that they will likely meet the full CPD requirements within the activities that they are already undertaking as part of their own commitment to professional development and delivery of quality services.

- The program has been designed to limit additional demands on time or impose costly commitments. We are aware that our registrants, in most instances, are required to manage complex competing demands in the work place on a daily basis. We acknowledge the impact on individuals faced with the reality of managing high caseloads and increasing employer demands that are being placed on registrants. However, these pressures and demands make it even more important that our registrants take time for reflection and consideration of their current practice, whether they need to increase their knowledge due to changes in the field and which skills they need to enhance to work more effectively with their clients.

In a paragraph, what is the CPD program? In November, at the beginning of each CPD annual cycle registrants will be asked to reflect on their scope of practice and identify development objectives on which they will focus, in light of new evidence in the field. Then they will formulate these professional development goals into learning objectives using the professional development planning tool. During the remainder of the CPD annual cycle, registrants undertake identified activities that are related to the professional learning goals. Activities such as supervision, mentorship, consultations on ethics, group discussions, rounds, conferences, webinars, teleconferences, conferences, and reading journal articles and books can be included. Registrants can keep a log of these activities using the record form tool, as they add up to meet the hourly requirements of the program. Finally, as the CPD annual cycle comes to a close on October 31, CPD participants write a short statement (650 words – about a page) on how the development activities undertaken have increased knowledge and skills, enhanced, and otherwise improved their individual practice.

It is fully acknowledged that ongoing quality practice improvement for more experienced registrants is more difficult to attain, but that should not mean that there is not value in engaging in a process of reflection on practice. We have been made aware from a small number of social workers in administrative, supervisory, and management positions, that while they support the principles of this CPD program and see its value in developing intellectual capital amongst registrants and promoting best practices for clients, it isn't something that they feel they should be required to do. They advise us that they will likely not renew their registration because of these new CPD requirements aimed to improve practice. Social Work, as a profession, is currently under significant pressure from both regulated professions and non-regulated groups. I don't know of another profession in which those in senior or influential positions would opt not to continue to be proud members of their profession.

I feel honoured and privileged to be involved with the social work profession. Your work is honourable, valuable, and as anyone who has walked through many of our communities is aware, there is incredible need. Be safe this holiday season.

Registration Statistics

This year has been busy for registration staff and committee members. Here are the latest numbers from the registration department.

TOTALS	Applications Received	Registered Full	Registered Clinical	Registered New Grad	Registered Non-Practicing	Total New Registrants
As at Nov 2013	679	581	14	112	6	713

By Class of Registration	Full	Clinical	Non Practising	Total Registrants
As at Nov 2013	3108	140	224	3472

Farewell and Thanks

With the end of the year comes the end of term for three experienced members of the board of directors. The board and staff of the College expresses sincere thanks to the following departing members:

Ed Berry, RSW
Susan Hogman, RSW
Susan Noakes, RSW

Many of you are familiar with the names, if not the individuals. Ed, Susan and Susan have been committed to the social work profession for many years, contributing their time and knowledge with real passion. The College and the social work profession has benefitted immeasurably from their work. If you are fortunate and cross paths with any (or all) of them, please take a moment to say thank you.

We have also enjoyed the support and commitment of many volunteers who have participated as members on committees and focus groups. While too many to name, their work is highly valued and important to the College and the practice of social work. A big thank you to all volunteers.

Election of the Board 2014

Each year, registrants of the College have the opportunity to elect their peers to the board of directors. The election process begins in September with the call for nominations. This year, for the first time, the College conducted voting for elected office through an online voting site. Paper ballots were used for registrants who have not provided an email address.

We are pleased to announce the results of the election of members to the board. Ballots were verified and counted, and results confirmed, by an independent election scrutineer, on November 15, 2013. There were 1062 electronic ballots and six ballots received by mail. The total number of votes cast was 3,664 out of a possible of 4,272 votes. At the conclusion of the count, two candidates had received the same number of votes. In accordance with section 7(6) of the bylaws, the Registrar determined the elected candidate by random draw. The random draw was witnessed by the independent electoral scrutineer. The members elect are:

Renée Avitan
Susan Barr
Liz Jones
Joshua Myers

The board of the College would like to take this opportunity to express their sincere gratitude to all candidates who allowed their names to stand for election. Every one of the candidates brought a high degree of commitment to the College's primary role, which is to act in the public interest.

Licensure Exam for Registration as a Social Worker

The board of the College, at its November meeting, approved a significant change in the requirements for registration. Since inception, the bylaws of the College, have included section 41(1)(d) which established the "successful completion of the examinations required by the board" as a condition for full registration. As of September 1, 2015, all applicants, except those who are registered and have practised in another Canadian jurisdiction, will be required to complete the Association of Social Work Boards' licensure examination.

In June, the College began an ongoing consultation with educators and others, in preparation for this change. Meetings with a number of Universities are scheduled in the new year. The board agreed to an implementation date in 2015 to provide institutions with sufficient time to review the practice analysis on which the exam is based and identify whether any gaps in curriculum exist.

The requirement to complete the examination will apply to persons who may have been registered in the past but let their registration lapse; and to individuals practising social work under any one of the exemptions from registration. Exempt individuals who may require registration in the future wishing to avoid writing the exam are encouraged to make application for registration earlier rather than later. It is anticipated that persons making application after June 2015 will be subject to the examination requirement depending on the complexity of their application. The College encourages registrants to share this news widely. If you know someone who is currently not registered, whether employed under an exemption or because they are in an administrative or management position, please pass along this important information.

Inquiry Committee

Curtis Magnuson, RSW
Chair of Inquiry Committee

Part of the regulatory function of the College is to receive and investigate complaints regarding Registered Social Workers. The *Social Workers Act* protects the titles Social Worker, Registered Social Worker, Registered Clinical Social Worker and the abbreviations SW, RSW, and RCSW.

Of the 11 complaints received in 2013, six are open and under investigation. Of the five that were concluded, one was dismissed by the Registrar; one entered into a complaint resolution agreement; and, in each of the other three files the inquiry committee found that the behaviour of the registrant was satisfactory and agreed to take no action. More often than not, after an investigation, the conduct of the registrant is found to be satisfactory.

"A social worker shall maintain the best interest of the client as the primary professional obligation"

There are two additional files that were brought forward from the year 2012, and one file brought forward from 2011 regarding misuse of the protected title Social Worker.

In general, complaints are received from members of the pubic or clients who may have had direct interaction with a social worker or from a family member or friend of a client. When the College receives a complaint about the practice of a registrant, we foremost consider the first statement of our Code of Ethics: "A social worker shall maintain the best interest of the client as the primary professional obligation". We also rely on the Standards of Practice in the assessing complaints. As part of the investigation process, we seek and rely upon clear documentation which demonstrates that the social worker considered the best interest of the client. The documentation is often sufficient evidence to demonstrate the conduct of the social worker is satisfactory. We also field a number of calls from people with complaints or concerns about exempt social workers, most often those with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Exempt agencies, as defined in regulation, are outside the jurisdiction of the College and these calls are redirected to the complaints process within MCFD or other relevant agencies.

In 2013, the government made significant changes to the *Criminal Record Review Act (CRRA)*. This *Act* requires registrants to submit to a criminal record check and provide criminal record check authorization to the College every five years. When a registrant fails to authorize the check, the College must conduct an inquiry and contact the registrant's employers.

At the close of the *CRRA* cycle, there were 12 registrants who failed to provide this authorization and as is required by law, the inquiry committee must conduct an investigation; 12 new files will be opened at the start of 2014.

Standards of Practice

The College is embarking on a new adventure! We are re-designing our Standards of Practice with guidance and direction from your peers. The Standards workgroup is made up of highly experienced social workers with a vast array of expertise, skills, and knowledge in many different areas of social work practice. The workgroup acts in a consultative and critical manner to the College staff by sharing its practice wisdom, to support the re-design of a new set of Standards of Practice which better reflect and promote contemporary social work practice in BC.

Standards of Practice are essential in that they outline what all social workers are expected to know, understand, and be able to do in undertaking the practice of social work. The Standards provide for a minimum level of practice competency to ensure the protection of the public by ensuring that all social workers practice safely, efftively, and legally within their scope of practice. Therefore the Standards act both as the instrument to assess levels of performance and also provide standardization of practice within the province.

"competency and capacity to practice with regard to public safety"

The new Standards of Practice will describe the requirements for entry-level competency and capacity to practice with regard to public safety. They are also being designed as aspirational and progressive in promoting the quality of social work practice in BC.

Currently, a guiding framework for the development of the Standards of Practice has been developed. The framework is drawn from research into other international jurisdictions that have recently revised their Standards. The new Standards of Practice will be developed alongside a variety of other quality assurance initiatives such as practice guidelines, adopting a new or refined Code of Ethics, the introduction of the Continuing Professional Development Program (Nov 1, 2013) and the implementation of the Licensure Exam for new applicants (Sep 1, 2015).

The guiding framework for the development of the new Standards of Practice that has been approved by the College's Quality Assurance Committee reflects the underlying principles and values of social work in our province. These values should underpin all components of practice which are common to all scopes of social work. Each component of practice identified will then have practice standards to describe the nature of that component and indicators that will allow social workers to evaluate whether they are meeting minimum competencies. For example, one *component* of practice is likely to be 'ethics', the *standard* expected of social workers would be to adhere to an identified Code of Ethics, and one *indicator* could be that social workers seek to identify inequalities and advocate for change.

"reflects the underlying principles and values of social work"

Our next steps will be to create a timeline for this significant and essential piece of work and identify key deliverables. Part of this work will be to identify the common broad components within all areas of social work practice across BC including direct, private, clinical, administrative, educational, research, management, etcetera. We will also evaluate the usefulness of our current Code of Ethics and will consider adopting a more relevant Code that can better reflect the aspirations of the practice of social work in BC today.

As previously mentioned, we will also be developing practice guidelines which will provide support and clarification to the Standards. For example, we have drafted practice guidelines on obtaining consent from children. We would like to invite you to share your ideas and views on other types of practice guidelines that could usefully be developed to support you in your area of practice.

Please email Chelsea Cooledge chelsea.cooledge@bccsw.ca or Makhan Shergill makhan.shergill@bccsw.ca with your ideas for practice guidelines.

The Social Work Record

BC College of Social Workers Standards of Practice set out requirements for Registered Social Workers related to record keeping (Principle 4). The Standard of Practice on records is taken in the context of and linked to other Standards, the Social Workers Act, Bylaws, and Code of Ethics. Other pieces of legislation relevant to social work practice also influence record creation, storage, sharing and dissemination.

At the College, we often receive questions about practice issues. Most times, part of the discussion will encompass the absolute importance of accurate record keeping. The creation and maintenance of records is vital to our practice. The recording and sharing of information is a component of practice found to be common in all areas of social work. The record not only collects information about the client relevant to their care needs, but also guides the social work intervention. Social workers who are not in direct clinical practice also keep records essential to their work such as employee records and information that facilitates day-to-day functioning of the organization.

"the creation and maintenance of records is vital to our practice"

In the social work record, it is important to be thorough but concise. Write only what is relevant and nothing more. It becomes important to write more detail when you are faced with an ethical dilemma. You must clearly state your decision-making process. It must also be evident that you are working in the best interest of the client at all times.

In general, a record serves three purposes: communication; demonstration of competence; and a demonstration of compliance with legislation and regulatory standards.

Communication

The social work record is a tool of communication. It should effectively communicate the details and nature of the service being delivered. The record informs other disciplines involved in the care of the client regarding the social work intervention, assessment, and plan of care. It contributes social work values, principles, and practice to the interdisciplinary team. The record communicates the service to other social workers that allow for the continuity of care of the client. It also provides a history for the client for their own records as well as for future care purposes. It should therefore be accessible, protected and organized.

Competence

When the College receives a complaint regarding the practice of a social worker, the Standards of Practice, Act and By-laws are used to assess the registrant's competence and conduct. The College will rely on the social worker's records to make a determination about whether the complaint will be forwarded to the inquiry committee to assess the competence of the social worker or whether it can be dismissed by the registrar. Therefore a clear and accurate record is vitally important and should demonstrate the social worker's knowledge and skill and the methods used.

Compliance with Legislation and Regulation

Similar to the use of records to assess a registrant's competence, the record also demonstrates a social worker's understanding and application of a social work method of intervention and legislation relevant to their area and scope of practice. The record is a requirement of a registrant under the *Social Workers Act* and Bylaws. The *Act* provides for the College to review the records of a registrant and the registrant must cooperate with a request to provide records.

The creation of a record is based on principles of accountability, integrity, transparency, and protection.

Accountability

The social work record demonstrates the social worker's accountability to the client, the employer, their profession, and the regulatory body, and for the service provided.

Integrity

The principle of integrity relates to the record being authentic and unaltered. There should be evidence that it was written by the author and there should be an evidence trail or audit of any corrections. The record itself must be reliable and the methods for storing the record should also be reliable. The record should adhere to the policies of the organization and legislative requirements.

Transparency

This principle applies to the method of record keeping. It should be evident that the system of record keeping is complete and accurate with the structure and process understandable and apparent.

Protection

The record should be protected and the information kept private and confidential. This protection is mandated by privacy legislation, organizational policy, standards of practice, and regulation.

Finally, a system should exist that ensures the record's availability, retention, and destruction.

Currently our standards state that social workers must comply with the requirements for record retention, storage, preservation and security as set out in applicable privacy and other legislation. Social workers must ensure that the record is stored for a period of time not less than 7 years from the date of the last entry or, if the client was a minor, for not less than 7 years past the date at which the client turned the age of majority. The social worker must also transfer their records to another registered social worker when they cease practice and make reasonable effort to inform the clients.

We recently received a call from a registrant who asked what would happen to her records if she died. In this situation, the same principle applies; leave clear instructions in a legal will for the safe and appropriate transfer of records to occur after your death.

Acknowledgement:
Arma international http://www.arma.org/

Continuing Professional Development Launches

Andrea Harstone, RCSW
Chair, Quality Assurance Committee

I am pleased to announce the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program for the BC College of Social Workers that came into effect November 1, 2013.

In 2008, the new *Social Workers Act* created the provision for a mandatory *'continuing competency program to promote high practice standards amongst registrants'*. Work on developing a continuing professional development program has been in the planning phase for quite some time. Although the new CPD program has been a long time coming, I am proud of the extensive research and work that has been devoted to its planning, design, and implementation by the current and past Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) members, the College staff, the current and previous boards of directors, and registrants. Throughout the development of this initiative, the intent has been to have a comprehensive program that isn't simply prescriptive and based on counting hours, but rather is focused on meaningful on-going professional learning and development that is integrated with, and builds upon, a registrant's existing knowledge, skills, and abilities. A second key consideration, maintained throughout the process of development, was to design a program that is inclusive and accessible to all registrants, regardless of scope of practice or practice location whether in urban, rural, or remote settings.

"a program that is inclusive and accessible to all registrants"

To support the implementation of the new CPD program, College staff has developed a CPD Guide to orientate registrants to the program and included a number of support tools to help you get started. The CPD Guide and associated support tools can be found on the BCCSW website.

The QAC is excited to embark on this journey with you and I am confident that registrants will be fully supported in engaging with the first annual cycle of the CPD program. We will continue to encourage open and ongoing dialogue between registrants and the College regarding the CPD program and invite you to communicate any questions, suggestions, or ideas on how the program can be further enhanced over the coming years.

"we will continue to encourage open and ongoing dialogue"

Since the College's QAC was established in 2008, there have been several key contributors. In particular I would like to thank Chi Ying Wong, Bruce Northey and Glen Schmidt for their early work. I would also like to thank the current QAC members: Susan Noakes, Leonard Ibbs, Elaine Halsall, Heidi Meseyton, Sandy Lundmark, and the current BCCSW Board.

My sincere thanks go to College staff members who have spent a tremendous amount of time and energy designing, and more recently preparing, for the implementation of the CPD program. Their knowledge and skill in guiding the QAC has been instrumental in finally launching the CPD program after many years of development.

Along with embedding and monitoring the first yearly cycle of the CPD program, the QAC will now focus more attention on other key policy priorities. This includes the development of a revised set of Standards of Practice, which are more aligned to and reflective of the contemporary nature of social work practice here in BC, and supporting practice guidelines.

The BCCSW Continuing Professional Development Program

Background: the Legal Mandate

In 2008, the BC government introduced a new *Social Workers Act* which transformed the Board of Registration for Social Workers to a new regulatory body: the British Columbia College of Social Workers. This Act enshrines the values and principles of the College and provides the legal mandate for the College to pursue its primary function of protecting the public interest. The College strives to achieve this by ensuring practising social workers maintain their capacity to practice safely, effectively and legally.

In carrying out its duty to protect the public and discharge its responsibilities in the public interest, the Act bestows upon the College a number of duties and objectives. One of these objectives is *'to establish and maintain a continuing competence program to promote high practice standards amongst registrants'*. This legal requirement is to be met by the introduction of the College's Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program.

A New Responsibility

Beginning November 1, 2013, practising social workers took on the requirement to engage in ongoing professional development. The College's CPD Program is a key component in the quality assurance of the practice of social work in BC. Social workers will be required to continually engage with learning in order to enhance their professional knowledge, skills, and ability to maintain the provision of effective services to their clients.

Maintaining a capacity to practice safely, effectively, and legally is in adherence with the College's Code of Ethics:

> *A social worker shall have and maintain competence in the provision of social work services to a client.*
>
> *A social worker shall promote excellence in the profession.*

The expectation that registrants remain current with knowledge and practice relevant to their scope of practice is also set out in *Principle 2* of the Standards of Practice: *'Competence and Integrity'*. This also requires a commitment to continuous professional development:

> *Social workers maintain competence and integrity in their practice and adhere to the standards in the College Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*

Competence or professional development, in this instance, can be defined as the integration of knowledge, skills, and abilities including the professional judgments that are required for safe, effective, and ethical social work intervention within a designated scope of practice. Professional development is perceived as an ongoing process of learning and development for registrants and not an endpoint.

The Importance of CPD in Social Work

The discipline of social work is a profession which, at its core, aims to help individuals, groups, and communities seek individual and collective well-being. While social work deals with individual problems, it is also alert to and concerned about broader social structures and how they interact on people's lives. Social work's potential to promote and direct social change, gives the profession a unique identity among other 'helping' professions, as it places human rights and social justice as the philosophical underpinnings of its purpose. These underpinnings, in turn, elicit a set of underlying values and ethics which inform social work's knowledge and skills to shape and direct practices.

Social workers, through an emphasis on respectful relationship, work with individuals, groups, and communities to resolve dilemmas and difficulties that impinge on their lives. Professional relationships based on humanistic principles, choice, self-determination, and partnership offer the most effective way for social workers to engage with and empower their clients to re-gain and maintain control over their own lives.

In order to carry out these core functions of social work, a social worker's commitment to their ongoing professional development is considered essential in ensuring they remain current with professional developments and enhance their practice in line with emerging evidence. Undertaking continuous professional development guarantees that the practice of social work remains informed and relevant to clients' needs, given the changing context of contemporary society. Equally, it also ensures that social work retains its effectiveness in its pursuit of promoting social justice for those who are disadvantaged, socially excluded, and marginalised in society.

In developing the CPD Program, a major consideration has been to support the realisation of the above aspirations of social work. The program is also designed to be accessible to all registrants, taking account of the various scopes of practice and the urban, rural, and remote nature of social work delivery peculiar to BC. The program is meant to be meaningful and enriching for individual social workers and the social work community as a whole, resulting in benefits for clients. It benefits from extensive research into continuing development programs of other regulatory bodies both nationally and internationally.

Advancing Social Work through Continuing Professional Development

Throughout your career as a social worker, it is important to keep abreast of progress and evidence in your field by continually maintaining your professional development and learning. In this way, your clients are assured of receiving the best quality of service that can assist them in resolving the issues for which they seek support.

"engage, learn, enhance, transform, advance"

The College is taking a new approach to strengthen the quality of the practice of social work in BC, by introducing a mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Program. From November 1, 2013, all registrants are required to engage with this program to ensure they continue to practice safely, effectively and legally.

The College has been working on a Continuing Professional Development program for a number of years and the current CPD program is derived from that work and the many perspectives and opinions voiced by registrants over the years as to what it should look like and attempt to accomplish.

The new CPD program is designed as a model of self-directed learning to accommodate the professional development needs of individual social workers and to take into account the broad range of practice that is undertaken within BC.

One of the key aims of the CPD program is to support social workers, in a structured way, to continue updating their knowledge and skills in order to continually improve the quality of their service delivery for the direct benefit of their clients.

We are aware that many social workers already participate in learning activities which contribute to their ongoing professional development. Almost any learning activity that contributes to improving knowledge, skills and practice can be considered as CPD.

So what are the benefits for a registrant in participating in CPD?

Apart from complying with the requirements for ongoing registration there can be numerous personal and professional benefits of undertaking CPD. These benefits can include:

- Increased performance in your current role
- Planned preparation for future roles or changes in scope of practice
- A boost to self confidence in practice abilities
- Ongoing development of professional competence, capability and reputation as a practitioner
- Ongoing academic development and contribution to the discipline of social work

What are the benefits for the social work profession in BC?

- A highly skilled professional workforce
- Improved morale and motivation
- Realising the talent and potential within the BC social work community
- Portraying a high degree of professionalism and raising public confidence in the profession of social work
- Development of communities of practice

The introduction of the CPD program is an ideal opportunity for the BC social work community to reflect upon and identify its strengths and areas for development as a profession. For registrants, CPD provides opportunities to increase knowledge and skills and to raise the standard of individual practice. This will directly benefit the recipients of social work services who are at the centre of what we do.

Reflective Practice, CPD, and Social Work What is it?

Self-directed learning and reflective practice are key elements of reflective learning which is the base for the design of the new CPD Program. So what is reflective practice and how can we identify if we, or others, are engaging in it?

Reflective practice essentially refers to the process of learning from experience by 'hovering above' and thinking about your own practice, and applying this knowledge.

Critical reflection goes further. Rather than only being concerned with the immediate processes that constitute practice, it also involves the power dynamics of the situation and wider structures that shape practice.

"reflexivity contributes to your awareness of self and your impact on practice"

Furthermore, reflexivity contributes to your awareness of self and your impact on practice, integrating personal knowledge and understanding with professional knowledge and understanding. Reflexivity assumes that peoples' understanding of their social context are part of that social context. Social workers do not just occupy social spaces; they partly create them through their assumptions, understandings and influence. Accordingly, this means social workers remain open to alternative ways of understanding and are willing to question what they know and how they know it.

Reflective practice, critical reflection and reflexivity are key components, among others, of Critical Social Work approaches.

How do I know if I'm being reflective?

While the research base on identifying indicators of reflective practice is limited, some measures that we would anticipate a reflective social worker to show include:

- Keen interest in getting better at their craft
- Ability to make explicit the knowledge that drives their practice and critically examine it
- Flexibility in their approach: driven by clients' needs rather than agency directives
- Awareness of the impact they have on clients
- Self-awareness: can distinguish between their own needs and feelings and those of their clients
- Clarity about their role
- Ability to take appropriate responsibility for own actions
- Ability to build on past learning and recognize when it might be transferable (learning how to learn)
- Interest in applying knowledge and values in ways that maintain a balance between pragmatism and idealism
- Ability to coherently analyse and defend or adapt their practice.

Reflective skills in action: peer support groups

While applying reflective practice skills when working with clients, social workers can also apply reflective skills in the context of a supportive peer group in order to develop understanding of certain practice events. Creating these safe spaces for reflection can allow social workers to express emotions that can arise from specific practice events like critical incidents. For example, a certain encounter with a client may afterwards arouse strong emotional feelings of vulnerability, failure, or anger. Applying reflective practice skills through a supportive peer group can be extremely beneficial for the impacted social worker who can be supported to process their feelings without fear of repercussion.

Facilitated peer support using reflective practice skills can contribute to reducing work-related stress and act as an alternative to formal supervision. Supervision normally holds the tension between supporting a social worker and managing their performance, so supervision isn't the ideal place for social workers to articulate emotions that impact practise.

A model for supportive peer group reflection would include the following stages:

- Developing awareness of the practice issue (critical incident) and what is occurring
- Applying knowledge to describe the issue
- Developing understanding by conceptualising the issue or experience
- Finding a way forward to deal with the issue.

These peer facilitated groups can also deal with ethical dilemmas that arise in practice which can be particularly useful in multi-agency settings.

Setting up and engaging in these peer support groups can provide valuable practice, personal, and professional insights and identify future learning that can be included as part of your CPD learning objectives.

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Common Practice Dilemmas: Use of Technology in Practice

The expanding use of digital, online and other electronic technology throughout society is happening rapidly. Social workers are required to make use of this electronic technology for a variety of reasons and face ethical dilemmas as a result. The debate around the use of technology in social work practice involves the potential advantages, such as the increased accessibility by clients who otherwise would be unable to engage in 'first person' counselling, versus the potential risks, such as compromised confidentiality. There is also debate around the efficacy of counselling and psychotherapy performed exclusively via electronic means. This continues to be a new and burgeoning field and many of the methods used to conduct electronic therapy have not been fully researched and therefore controversy surrounds their validity.

"there is potential for ethical, legal and regulatory dilemmas"

There are many options for the delivery of electronic social work services. These may include email, Skype, SMS or text, open chat sessions, closed chat session, web or video conferencing, Facebook, blogs and Twitter. A variety of terminology accompanies the use of technology in the delivery of social work services such as e-counselling, online therapy, and cyber-counselling (e.g. avatar therapy). These sources of technology come with increased complexity and concerns which are significantly different from technology that is simply used for administrative purposes, such as scheduling or cancelling appointments. Regardless of use, there is potential for ethical, legal and regulatory dilemmas in practice through the use of existing, new and emerging technologies.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) have jointly created *Standards for Technology and Social Work Practice.* This document is a guide for social workers using technology as an adjunct to practice and for those who deliver services exclusively with the use of technology. The document seeks to address the following:

- Ethics and values expected of social workers when providing services through electronic means including accurate self-representation
- Social workers' and clients' access to technology and proficiency in its use
- Awareness of cultural differences and appropriateness of certain types of technology for specific clients
- Compliance with regulatory and legislative requirements in both the jurisdictions of where the client is located and where the social worker provides services
- Privacy, confidentiality, documentation, security, and risk management
- Competency
- Continuing education beyond entry-level competencies.

You can access the ASWB document at http://www.aswb.org/pdfs/TechnologySWPractice.pdf

Significant legal dilemmas occur when social workers provide services across jurisdictions. For example, a social worker located in BC delivers service electronically to a client located in Alberta. Under current laws, the social worker would be required to be registered in both jurisdictions. More often than not, they are only registered in the jurisdiction where they are located. Regardless, the practice of the social worker remains subject to regulation in both jurisdictions.

"it is the responsibility of the social worker to be aware of these regulations"

With few exceptions, legislation requires the social worker to be registered in the jurisdiction in which they are providing service. It is generally accepted that the service is delivered in the jurisdiction where the client is located. It is the responsibility of the social worker to be aware of these regulations. Social workers engaging in electronic practice should carefully assess the licensure and regulatory requirements for each jurisdiction in which their clients are located. The social worker providing the services should always prepare a comprehensive information package for clients that addresses issues such as the location and provincial regulatory authority with which the social worker is registered.

"have clear and concise client consent agreements"

Social workers are strongly advised to check with their professional liability insurance provider to ensure that their insurance will cover a claim based on the electronic provision of services. This is especially true if the client is in the United States. Some Canadian-based insurance companies specifically exclude trans-national clients.

Finally, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is to have clear and concise client consent agreements and detailed service contracts, along with accurate, complete, and contemporaneous client records. This is particularly true of social workers employed within organizations that may not have policies and practices that meet regulatory requirements.

For our clients to be best served, social workers should reference current practice standards and relevant legislation when engaging technology in their practice and in developing policies and procedures in their work place. The use of technology to deliver services requires a different approach than the use of social media by a professional.

Social media has become pervasive in our society. Often the person engaging in such technologies does not fully consider the implications, both personally and professionally. Did you know, that at one time by accepting the 'end user agreement' of the most common social media site you allowed that site to have full and unrestricted ownership of any and all information you posted to a page? In fact, even if you deleted your

account, the site could restore your entire profile, without asking your permission or otherwise notifying you.

It is good practice to develop and implement a professional social media policy that clearly differentiates how you use social media personally. Social workers employed in large organizations may find that social media policies already exist within the organization.

A social media policy takes on great importance for social workers in small communities and in private practice. When developing a social media policy in private practice you must first consider the types of social media you may use in your practice and the broad implications of those technologies. There is a need to address boundary and privacy issues and expected conduct for each different type of media. For example, if, how and when you would accept or refuse 'friend' requests to a work-based Facebook page? Who and what type of content is posted to the page? If comments are an option, how will you deal with negative posts about you or your service or positive posts that are the equivalent of testimonials?

"consider the effect of technology and social media on your personal life"

Consider the effect of technology and social media on your personal life. Your technology and social media policy should set out how and when clients may contact you using electronic means (i.e. social media, phone or email) and your expected response time. It should also include the limits to confidentiality for all use of technology and provide alternate arrangements in the event that you are unable to respond in the timeframe expected. Is email used for administrative or therapeutic purposes? How often will you check the email messages and respond? Have you clearly stated the risks to privacy in the use of email and does the client have the capacity to understand those risks? How do you capture, as part of the client record, electronic interactions? Have you clearly addressed, and does the client understand, how you may terminate your electronic service or intervention? Take the time to inform the client of their rights and the limitations of electronic practice.

If you ever feel unsure, review relevant codes of ethics, standards, laws, policies and consult with a trusted, knowledgeable peer, supervisor, or with the College. Documenting decision pathways and steps you have taken to reach a decision enhances the service you provide to your clients and protects you as a professional. A general standard to guide your decision is to ask yourself what an ordinary, reasonable and prudent professional would do in a similar circumstance.

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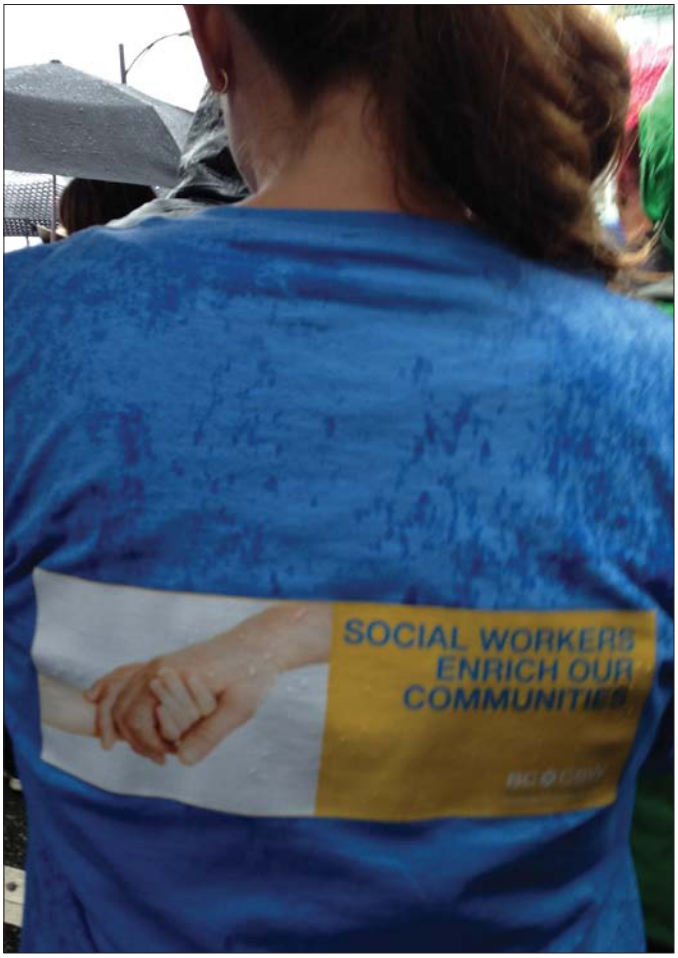

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