



## PRINCIPLE II: COMPETENCE AND INTEGRITY

College members maintain competence and integrity in their practice and adhere to the College standards in the *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice Handbook* and the College's by-laws.

### Interpretation

#### 2.1 Competence

College members are committed to ongoing professional development and maintaining competence in their practice.

2.1.1 College members are responsible for being aware of the extent and parameters of their competence and their professional scope of practice and limit their practice accordingly.<sup>1</sup> When a client's needs fall outside the College member's usual area of practice, the member informs the client of the option to be referred to another professional. If, however, the client wishes to continue the professional relationship with the College member and have the member provide the service, the member may do so provided that:

- (i) he or she ensures that the services he or she provides are competently provided by seeking additional supervision, consultation and/or education and
- (ii) the services are not beyond the member's professional scope of practice.

Recommendations for particular services, referrals to other professionals or a continuation of the professional relationship are guided by the client's interests as well as the College member's judgement and knowledge.

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.
- 2.1.4 College members ensure that any professional recommendations or opinions they provide are appropriately substantiated by evidence and supported by a credible body of professional social work knowledge or a credible body of professional social service work knowledge.<sup>2,3</sup>
- 2.1.5 As part of maintaining competence and acquiring skills in social work or social service work practice, College members engage in the process of self-review and evaluation of their practice and seek consultation when appropriate.

## 2.2 Integrity

College members are in a position of power and responsibility to all clients.<sup>4</sup> This necessitates that care be taken to ensure that these clients are protected from the abuse of such power during and after the provision of professional services.

College members establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries in professional relationships for the protection of clients. Boundary violations include sexual misconduct and other misuse and abuse of the member's power. Non-sexual boundary violations may include emotional, physical, social and financial violations. Members are responsible for ensuring that appropriate boundaries are maintained in all aspects of professional relationships.

- 2.2.1 College members do not engage in professional relationships that constitute a conflict of interest or in situations in which members ought reasonably to have known that the client would be at risk in any way. College members do not provide a professional service to the client while the member is in a conflict of interest.<sup>5</sup> College members achieve this by:
  - (i) evaluating professional relationships and other situations involving clients or former clients for potential conflicts of interest and seeking consultation to assist in identifying and dealing with such potential conflicts of interest;
  - (ii) avoiding conflicts of interest and/or dual relationships with clients or former clients, or with students, employees and supervisees, that could impair members' professional judgement or increase the risk of exploitation or harm to clients<sup>6,7</sup>; and



- (iii) if a conflict of interest situation does arise, declaring the conflict of interest and taking appropriate steps to address it and to eliminate the conflict.
- 2.2.2 College members do not have sexual relations with clients (See Principle VIII: Sexual Misconduct, especially Interpretations 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8 and footnote 1 thereto.) In other professional relationships, College members do not have sexual relations with any person where these relations, combined with the professional relationship, would create a conflict of interest. (See Interpretation 8.9 under Principle VIII: Sexual Misconduct)
- 2.2.3 College members do not use information obtained in the course of a professional relationship, and do not use their professional position of authority, to coerce, improperly influence, harass, abuse or exploit a client, former client, student, trainee, employee, colleague or research subject.
- 2.2.4 College members do not solicit or use information from clients to acquire, either directly or indirectly, advantage or material benefits.
- 2.2.5 When a complaint investigation is underway or a matter has been referred to the Discipline Committee or the Fitness to Practise Committee for a hearing, College members co-operate fully with all policies and procedures of the Complaints, Discipline and Fitness to Practise Committees, and conduct themselves in a manner which demonstrates respect for both the complainant and the College.<sup>8</sup>
- 2.2.6 College members do not engage in the practice of social work or social service work,
- i) while under the influence of any substance, or
  - ii) while suffering from illness or dysfunction,
- which the member knows or ought reasonably to know impairs the member's ability to practise.
- 2.2.7 College members do not misrepresent professional qualifications, education, experience or affiliation. (See also Principle VI: Fees and Principle VII: Advertising)
- 2.2.8 In the practice of social work or social service work, College members avoid conduct which could reasonably be perceived as reflecting negatively on the professions of social work or social service work.



- 2.2.9 College members promote social justice and advocate for social change on behalf of their clients. College members are knowledgeable and sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and to forms of social injustice such as poverty, discrimination and imbalances of power that exist in the culture and that affect clients. College members strive to enhance the capacity of clients to address their own needs. College members assist clients to access necessary information, services and resources wherever possible. College members promote and facilitate client participation in decision making.<sup>9</sup>
- 2.2.10 If there is a conflict between College standards of practice and a College member's work environment, the College member's obligation is to the "Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers Code of Ethics" and the "Standards of Practice Handbook."<sup>10</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1. The scope of practice statements describe the professions' scope of practice, but do not exclusively limit the performance of the activities described therein to social workers and social service workers. Such statements provide three types of information – what the profession does, the methods the profession uses, and the purpose for which the profession does it. There is a scope of practice statement for social work and a scope of practice statement for social service work set out in the *Standards of Practice Handbook*. Note that the scope of practice differs from a job description, in which an employer defines the parameters of the various roles and duties to be performed by social workers and social service workers they hire. An employer is not obligated to allow a social worker or social service worker to perform all of the activities described in the scope of practice statement. Additionally, an employer may require a social worker or social service worker to perform activities that are not described in their scope of practice provided that the College member is permitted by law to perform those activities and the College member is competent to do so.
2. "Evidence" refers to information tending to establish facts. For College members, evidence can include, but is not limited to: direct observation; information collected in clinical sessions; information collected in professional meetings; collateral information; information from documents; and information gathered from the use of clinical tools (eg. diagnostic assessment measures, rating scales).
3. Each of the phrases "body of professional social work knowledge" and "body of professional social service work knowledge" relates to both theoretical and practical understanding. A body of knowledge can be attained through education, professional experience, consultation and supervision, professional development and a review of relevant research and literature. Professional social work knowledge and professional social service work knowledge draw upon the knowledge base of other professions including sociology,



psychology, anthropology, medicine, law and economics as well as their own respective distinct bodies of knowledge.

4. See the discussion of the term "client" in the Introductory Note to the Standards of Practice. While portions of Principle II refer separately to clients, students, employees and supervisees, the term "client" refers to any person or body that is the recipient of social work or social service work services, and may include students, employees and supervisees.
5. See, also, Principle VIII: Sexual Misconduct, Interpretation 8.5.
6. "Conflict of Interest" is defined as a situation in which a member has a personal, financial or other professional interest or obligation which gives rise to a reasonable apprehension that the interest or obligation may influence the member in the exercise of his or her professional responsibilities. **Actual** influence is not required in order for a conflict of interest situation to exist. It is sufficient if there is a **reasonable apprehension** that there **may** be such influence.

One of the hallmarks of a conflict of interest situation is that a reasonable person, informed of all of the circumstances, would have a reasonable apprehension (in the sense of reasonable expectation or concern) that the interest might influence the member. The influence need not be actual but may simply be perceived. However, a mere possibility or suspicion of influence is not sufficient to give rise to a conflict of interest. The interest must be significant enough to give rise to a "reasonable apprehension" that the personal, financial or other professional interest may influence the member in the performance of his or her professional responsibilities.

7. "Dual Relationship" is defined as a situation in which a College member, in addition to his/her professional relationship, has one or more other relationships with the client, regardless of whether this occurs prior to, during, or following the provision of professional services. A dual relationship does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest; however, where dual relationships exist, there is a strong potential for conflict of interest and there may be an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Relationships beyond the professional one include, but are not limited to, those in which the College member receives a service from the client, the College member has a personal, familial or business relationship with the client, or the College member provides therapy to students, employees or supervisees. Members embark on an evaluation of whether a dual relationship might impair professional judgment or increase the risk of exploitation or harm to clients.
8. College members are cognizant of their influential position with respect to witnesses or complainants in complaint, discipline and fitness to practise proceedings.
9. Where the client is competent and able to give instruction, advocacy should be on direction of the client.
10. A social worker or social service worker shall advocate for workplace conditions and policies that are consistent with the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers*. A social worker or social service worker will use professional judgement in determining how to advocate. Such advocacy may take the form of documenting concerns and discussing them with a supervisor or manager, or other key person in the organization.