



Ontario College of  
Social Workers and  
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs  
sociaux et des techniciens  
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## **Discipline Decision Summary**

This summary of the Discipline Committee's Decision and Reason for Decision is published pursuant to the Discipline Committee's penalty order.

By publishing this summary, the College endeavours to:

- illustrate for social workers, social service workers and members of the public, what does or does not constitute professional misconduct;
- provide social workers and social service workers with direction about the College's standards of practice and professional behaviour, to be applied in future, should they find themselves in similar circumstances;
- implement the Discipline Committee's decision; and
- provide social workers, social service workers and members of the public with an understanding of the College's discipline process.

### **DISGRACEFUL, DISHONOURABLE AND UNPROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

**LYNN M. KNIGHT**

**Member #521252**

#### **Agreed Statement of Fact**

The College and the Member submitted a written statement to the Discipline Committee in which the following facts were agreed:

1. Ms. Knight was at all relevant times registered as a social work member of the College, employed on a full-time basis as a therapist in the Adult Mental Health Service of a community hospital.
2. A client attended at the community hospital, seeking counselling for overeating, depression and social anxiety. When the client was seen for an initial assessment by Ms. Knight, the client presented with a history of social anxiety, anger, depression, childhood sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder. The client was also being medicated for temporal lobe epilepsy and anxiety, and was not employed and was supported by disability benefits.
3. The client attended weekly individual counselling sessions with Ms. Knight for approximately three months, with the exception of two weeks when the client attended two sessions per week. The intended focus of the counselling was the client's social relationships and coping strategies to manage anxiety, depression and associated weight gain. Ms. Knight provided the client with psychotherapy and counselling services.
4. After approximately three months of counselling, the client indicated consideration of terminating therapy with Ms. Knight. Ms. Knight scheduled one further future

appointment with the client. The client subsequently cancelled that appointment. Ms. Knight's progress notes record a telephone call from the client, post-dating the cancelled appointment, in which the client reportedly indicated wishing to terminate therapy. Ms. Knight closed the client's file with a closure summary.

5. During the course of Ms. Knight's therapeutic relationship with the client, Ms. Knight engaged in the following conduct, which is alleged to constitute a series of boundary crossings or boundary violations, including:
  - Removing her shoes during a therapy session, moving her chair opposite the client and putting her feet up on the couch beside the client (which Ms. Knight asserts was done with the client's prior consent as a result of Ms. Knight recently having had knee surgery);
  - Revealing personal information about herself (which Ms. Knight asserts was relevant to the therapy being provided to the client);
  - Reporting having a friendship with a previous client (which Ms. Knight stated occurred many years after the therapy ended. Such information only being provided following questioning by the client);
  - Having the client discuss past sexual/intimate relationships, although this was not germane to the client's therapy (which Ms. Knight asserts was relevant to therapy she was providing to the client);
  - Providing the client with her home e-mail address and exchanging e-mails with the client of a personal nature after the session in which the client indicated consideration of terminating therapy with Ms. Knight, but before the therapeutic relationship had been terminated;
  - Meeting with the client in Ms. Knight's apartment and elsewhere outside Ms. Knight's office after the session in which the client indicated consideration of terminating therapy with Ms. Knight;
  - Hugging the client after the session in which the client indicated consideration of terminating therapy with Ms. Knight;
  - Conducting herself in a manner that the client perceived as sexualizing the therapeutic relationship;
6. Following termination of the therapeutic relationship, but in the same month of termination, Ms. Knight established a personal and intimate relationship with the client, which included physical sexual relations and continued (intermittently) for approximately one year.
7. Early one morning in the following month, the client attended at the Emergency Department of the community hospital where Ms. Knight was employed, with suicidal ideation, which the client stated was precipitated by emotional abuse and sexual harassment by the client's former therapist (subsequently identified as Ms. Knight).
8. Early that same day the client also left a voice-mail message for Ms. Knight, advising her that the client was suicidal, was going to the community hospital's crisis unit to lay out the facts of the client's relationship with Ms. Knight and that it was all Ms. Knight's fault.
9. Ms. Knight prepared a "Closed Case Contact" form regarding the client's voice-mail message, misrepresenting the content of the message. The form omitted any reference to the personal and sexual relationship between the client and Ms. Knight

and suggested that the client was angry about having to resort to the community hospital's crisis service because the client was no longer Ms. Knight's client. This inaccurate Closed Case Contact became part of the client's record at the community hospital.

10. The information the client provided to the community hospital Emergency Department was relayed to the Clinical Director, Adult Outpatient Service, who subsequently interviewed Ms. Knight regarding the client's allegations. At that time, Ms. Knight denied that any therapeutic boundaries had been crossed. Ms. Knight attributed the client's allegations to certain emotional and/or psychological conditions from which she suggested the client was suffering (based on information obtained by Ms. Knight during her therapeutic relationship with the client). Ms. Knight subsequently admitted the truth of the allegations in a meeting with the Clinical Director five days later.
11. Between the date on which she was interviewed by the Clinical Director, and the date on which she admitted the allegations, Ms. Knight contacted the client and tried to convince the client to retract the complaint and to so advise the Clinical Director.
12. On the day prior to Ms. Knight's admission, the client attended at the Clinical Director's office and left with the receptionist there an envelope addressed to the Clinical Director containing a letter setting out the client's allegations against Ms. Knight together with copies of a number of e-mails and a CD ROM containing files of pictures documenting the client's allegations.
13. Ms Knight took the envelope from the receptionist, indicating she would deliver it to the Clinical Director, but failed to do so. When confronted by the Clinical Director about the missing envelope, Ms. Knight gave the Clinical Director the client's letter, but withheld the e-mails and the CD ROM. When confronted again by the Clinical Director, Ms. Knight only supplied copies of the e-mails. The CD ROM was subsequently located in Ms. Knight's desk.
14. On or about the same date, the community hospital suspended Ms. Knight's employment, pending a full investigation of her relationship with the client. After that investigation, Ms. Knight's employment with the community hospital was terminated.
15. On the day following termination of Ms. Knight's employment, the Clinical Director filed a mandatory report with the College in respect of Ms. Knight's conduct and her relationship with the client. Ms. Knight received notice from the College of that mandatory report and the substance of the allegations in the report.
16. While the College's investigation of that mandatory report was ongoing, Ms. Knight continued to maintain an intermittent personal and/or sexual relationship with the client.
17. Ms. Knight provided information about her professional training and work experience to the client, to enable the client to pose as Ms. Knight's previous employer (namely, as a Program Manager with whom Ms. Knight had worked at the community hospital). The client was to provide a job reference for Ms. Knight to a prospective employer, to assist Ms. Knight in obtaining a social work position with an agency. The client ultimately did not pose as a reference. There is a dispute as to whether the client initially suggested posing as a reference, or was first asked to do so by Ms. Knight.

## **Allegations and Plea**

The Discipline Committee accepted Ms. Knight's Plea, admitting the truth of the facts set out in the Agreed Statement of Fact and that she is guilty of professional misconduct as set out in Section 26(2)(a) and (c) of the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act* (the "Act"), as proof that the following acts of alleged professional misconduct occurred:

1. The Member violated sections 2.5 and 2.36 of Ontario Regulation 384/00 (Professional Misconduct), made under the Act, by abusing a client physically, sexually, verbally, psychologically or emotionally, and engaging in conduct or performing an act relevant to the practice of the profession that, having regard to all the circumstances, would reasonably be regarded by members as disgraceful, dishonourable or unprofessional when she established a personal and/or sexual relationship with the client, to whom Ms. Knight provided counselling services and/or psychotherapy services.
2. The Member violated section 2.6 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation by using information obtained during her professional relationship with a client, or using her professional position of authority to improperly influence or exploit a client or former client, when Ms. Knight established a personal and/or sexual relationship with the client, to whom she provided counselling services and/or psychotherapy services.
3. The Member violated section 2.2 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation and Section 1 of the Code of Ethics and (or in the alternative) Principle I of the Standards of Practice (commented on in Interpretations 1.5 and 1.6) by failing to regard the well being of the client as her primary professional obligation when Ms. Knight established and pursued a personal and/or sexual relationship with the client. In doing so Ms. Knight failed to distinguish her own needs from those of her client, failed to appreciate how her own needs might impact on her professional relationship with the client, placed her own needs before those of her client and failed to ensure that the client's interests were paramount.
4. The Member violated Principle II (2.2) of the Standards of Practice (commented on in Interpretations 2.2.1, 2.2.2, 2.2.3, and 2.2.8) by failing to maintain clear and appropriate boundaries in her professional relationship with the client when Ms. Knight established a personal and/or sexual relationship with the client, to whom she provided counselling services and/or psychotherapy services. In doing so, Ms. Knight placed herself in a conflict of interest situation in which she ought reasonably to have known that the client would be at risk and (or in the alternative) used her professional position of authority to abuse or exploit a client or former client.
5. The Member violated section 2.2 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation and Principle II (2.2) of the Standards of Practice (commented on in Interpretations 2.2.3 and 2.2.4) by using information obtained during her professional relationship with the client, and her professional position of authority to:
  - (a) coerce or improperly influence the client in the client's communications with Ms. Knight's former employer, the community hospital, and the College regarding Ms. Knight's professional conduct; and
  - (b) discredit the client in respect of those communications with Ms. Knight's former employer and the College for Ms. Knight's own advantage, namely: to

6. The Member violated section 2.19 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation by falsifying a record relating to her practice, namely: her record of a telephone message sent to her by the client early in the morning during the month following the termination of the therapeutic relationship.
7. The Member violated section 2.19 of the Professional Misconduct Regulation and Principle II of the Standards of Practice (as commented on in Interpretation 2.2.5) by failing to conduct herself in a manner which demonstrated respect for the client and the College while an investigation was underway concerning the allegations about Ms. Knight's conduct. In particular, Ms. Knight attempted to improperly influence the client to withdraw the allegations about Ms. Knight's conduct.

### **Penalty Order**

The panel of the Discipline Committee accepted the Joint Submission as to Penalty submitted by counsel for the College and counsel for Ms. Knight, and in doing so, made an order in accordance with the terms of the Joint Submission as to Penalty. The panel considered its penalty order to be reasonable and in the public interest, and appropriate having regard to the gravity of the professional misconduct in which Ms. Knight engaged. The panel ordered that:

1. The Registrar is directed to, forthwith, revoke Ms. Knight's certificate of registration, and a notation of that revocation shall be recorded on the register, together with the information directed by the Discipline Committee pursuant to paragraph 2;
2. The findings and Order of the Discipline Committee (or a summary thereof) shall be published, in detail or in summary, in the College's official publication, and/or in such other manner or medium as the Discipline Committee considers appropriate, with the name of the member but without any other identifying information.
3. For a period of four (4) years from the date of this Order disposing of the allegations against Ms. Knight, Ms. Knight shall not apply to the Registrar of the College for a new certificate of registration. Further, Ms. Knight shall agree, in writing, that if she applies to the Registrar of the College for a certificate of registration, all of the material in the College's files pertaining to the allegations may be considered by the Registrar and the Discipline Committee in dealing with Ms. Knight's application for a certificate of registration.