

Testimonials: Did you know...



Reprinted as a supplement from the Spring 2012 issue of *Perspective*, a semi-annual publication of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers.

PRINCIPLE VII:

Advertising in the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice Handbook, 2nd Edition, **prohibits** the use of endorsements or testimonials in “public statements, announcements, advertising media and promotional activities”.

THE ISSUE:

The use of testimonials by members appears to be increasing, perhaps because websites have now become one of the primary ways that members promote their private practices.

Members also make use of professional social media sites like LinkedIn, and funders or employers may ask for client stories rather than statistics.

THE CONCERN:

While testimonials or endorsements may be effective as promotional tools, they are prohibited for some important reasons, including:

- Testimonials may create a kind of dual relationship in which clients come to believe that they have a different relationship with the member as a result of the endorsement that they have provided. Members must “... distinguish their needs and interests from those of their clients to ensure that, within professional relationships, clients’ needs and interests remain paramount.”¹

“I am **qualified** to serve the public because I have specialized education and participate in continued professional learning. Every day, I strive to deliver better quality practice and care. I am a registered social worker.”

– ALLISON EADIE, RSW

- Testimonials tend to be associated with private businesses whose goal is to sell a product or service, rather than with professional services.
- Testimonials tend to be about “selling” services, and may be biased or misleading. They may not assist individuals in making good choices about the professional with whom they wish to work.

If you have further questions about this issue, or other practice concerns or ethical dilemmas, please contact: Christina Van Sickle, MSW, RSW, Director of Professional Practice, at 416-972- 9882 or 1-877-828-9380 ext. 226 or email cvansickle@ocswssw.org.

1. Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice Handbook, 2nd Edition, Principle I: Relationship with Clients, interpretation 1.6

