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June 11, 2018

College Response to the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee Report

The Office of the Chief Coroner has notified the College of the results of a review by the Domestic Violence Death Review Committee (“DVDRC”) and sought the College’s support in implementing one of its recommendations. This eBulletin seeks to assist in implementing the DVDRC’s recommendation by:

- Sharing the findings of the DVDRC with members.
- Reminding members of their professional obligations with respect to competence, currency and scope of practice
- Emphasizing the importance of ongoing training on risk assessment, risk management and safety planning in the prevention of domestic homicides, with special emphasis on the impact that depression may have on domestic violence and domestic homicide.

THE DVDRC REPORT

The DVDRC’s findings are published in the [*Report on the Matter of the Death of \(names removed\) OCC File: 2014-1470, DVDRC 2017-16*](#) (“DVDRC’s Report”). The death referred to in the DVDRC’s Report occurred on February 3rd, 2014.

In a letter accompanying the DVDRC Report, the DVDRC states its primary goals for the review:

The purpose of this Committee is to assist the Office of the Chief Coroner in the investigation and review of deaths of persons that occur as result of domestic violence, and to make recommendations to help prevent such deaths in similar circumstances.

By conducting a thorough and detailed examination and analysis of facts within individual cases, the DVDRC strives to develop a comprehensive understanding of why domestic homicides occur and how they might be prevented. Information considered within this examination includes the history, circumstances and conduct of the abusers/perpetrators, the victims and their respective families. Community and systemic responses are

examined to determine primary risk factors and to identify possible points of intervention that could assist in the prevention of similar deaths in the future.

Recommendation #1 of the DVDRC Report is directed at three regulatory colleges, specifically, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, the College of Psychologists of Ontario, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. The recommendation states that:

Social workers, psychologists and physicians are reminded of the importance of ongoing training on risk assessment, risk management and safety planning in the prevention of domestic homicides. Special emphasis should be given on the impact that depression has on domestic violence and domestic homicide.

MEMBERS' PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATIONS

In keeping with this recommendation, the College is providing the DVDRC's Report to all members. Members are reminded of their obligation, in accordance with [*The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice Handbook, Second Edition, 2008*](#), to provide services only within the boundaries of their competence. Principle II: Competence and Integrity, Interpretation 2.1.1 states:

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. 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.

The Standards of Practice also require members to ensure ongoing maintenance of competence and continuing professional development in the areas in which they provide services. This can be achieved by:

- Participating in ongoing continuing education and the Continuing Competence Program (CCP) in order to remain current with emerging practice knowledge.

- Maintaining current knowledge of policies, legislation, community programs and issues related to practice.
- Ensuring professional recommendations or opinions are based on current, credible sources and evidence.
- Engaging in the process of self-review and evaluation of practice, and seeking consultation when required.

Members are reminded that all areas of social work and social service work practice require a comprehensive knowledge base, effective and professional use of self, and mastery of specific skills. Members' knowledge and self-awareness are critical to ethical and professional practice. When assessing their competence, members should:

- ✓ Consider their levels of education, training, and experience.
- ✓ Explore practice challenges within the context of supervision.
- ✓ Participate in the CCP.
- ✓ Use the CCP to focus on the skills and knowledge required for new activities or areas of practice.

Members whose areas of practice are addressed by the DVDRC Report should ensure that they are current with respect to relevant and recent information related to the impact that depression has on domestic violence and domestic homicide, as well as the assessment of risk in these domains.

For more information:

- Practice Notes: "But How Do I Know If I'm Competent" – Issues to Consider <http://ocswssw.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/PN-How-Do-I-Know.pdf>
- Continuing Competence Program <http://www.ocswssw.org/the-continuing-competence-program/general-information-ccp/>
- *The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice Handbook, Second Edition, 2008* <http://www.ocswssw.org/professional-practice/code-of-ethics/>
- Domestic Violence Risk Assessment: Informing Safety Planning & Risk Management Domestic Homicide Brief 2 <http://www.ocswssw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Domestic-Violence-Risk-Assessment.pdf>

For further information, please contact the Professional Practice Department practice@ocswssw.org.