



Communication to OCSWSSW Registrants Regarding Use of the Title "Doctor"

Introduction:

Effective October 1, 2010, an amendment to the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* (SWSSWA) permits a College registrant who holds an earned doctorate in social work, to use the title "doctor", a variation, abbreviation or an equivalent in another language in the course of providing or offering to provide, in Ontario, health care to individuals, if they comply with certain conditions.

Please refer to the SWSSWA, [section 47.3](#), which can be found at www.e-laws.gov.on.ca.

Prior to this amendment, pursuant to the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, the use of the title "doctor" in the course of providing or offering to provide health care to individuals was restricted to five regulated health professions, namely: chiropractors, physicians, optometrists, psychologists and dentists. This amendment to the SWSSWA was welcomed not only by the College but also by our registrants who hold earned doctorates in social work.

This article is intended to provide registrants with general guidance about the use of the title "doctor". For comprehensive information, please consult the SWSSWA, regulations, College by-laws and policies. In the event of any discrepancy between this article and the SWSSWA, regulations, College by-laws and policies, the latter will prevail.

Understanding the Amendment to the *Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998* concerning Use of the Title "Doctor":

In order to use the title "doctor" in the course of providing or offering to provide, in Ontario, health care to individuals, a registrant must hold an earned doctorate in social work and comply with all of the requirements regarding the use of the title "doctor" in the SWSSWA, the regulations and the by-laws.

i. Earned Doctorate in Social Work:

In accordance with the SWSSWA and criteria set out in a College policy (the Policy) respecting earned doctorates in social work under subsection 47.3(2) of the SWSSWA, a registrant holds an earned doctorate in social work if the registrant meets **all** the requirements outlined in **either a), or b), or c) or d)** below.

- a) A College registrant who holds an earned doctorate in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution in Ontario**

An earned doctorate in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution in

Ontario is a doctoral degree in social work that is granted by a post-secondary educational institution authorized in Ontario to grant the degree under an Act of the Assembly, including a person that is authorized to grant the degree pursuant to the consent of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities under the *Post-secondary Education Choice and Excellence Act, 2000*.

As of October 1, 2010, the following educational institutions in Ontario are authorized to grant a doctoral degree in social work:

- McMaster University
- University of Toronto
- Wilfrid Laurier University
- University of Ottawa
- University of Windsor
- York University

b) A College registrant who holds an earned doctorate in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution in a Canadian province or territory other than Ontario, considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a).

In order to be considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a), the doctoral degree in social work held by a registrant must meet the following criteria:

- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution authorized in a Canadian province or territory other than Ontario to grant the degree under an Act of that province or territory;
- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution that also houses a Master's of Social Work (MSW) program accredited by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) or the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE);
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete specified courses;
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete a comprehensive paper or examination or the equivalent; and
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully defend a dissertation or thesis.

As of October 1, 2010, the following Canadian educational institutions outside Ontario are authorized to grant a doctoral degree in social work that meets the criteria in the Policy:

- McGill University
- Université de Montréal
- University of British Columbia
- University of Manitoba
- Memorial University
- Université Laval
- University of Calgary

c) A College registrant who holds an earned doctorate in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution in the United States of America, considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a). In order to be considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a), the doctoral degree in social work held by a registrant must meet the following criteria:

- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution authorized under the laws of the relevant jurisdiction of the United States of America to grant the degree;
- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution that also houses a Master's of Social Work (MSW) program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE);
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete specified courses;
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete a comprehensive paper or examination, or the equivalent; and
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully defend a dissertation or thesis.

d) A College registrant who holds an earned doctorate in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution in a country other than Canada or the United States of America, considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a).

In order to be considered by the College to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work described in a), the doctoral degree in social work held by a registrant must meet the following criteria:

- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution authorized under the laws of the relevant jurisdiction of the country to grant the degree;
- the program leading to the doctoral degree in social work is offered at a post-secondary educational institution that also houses a Master's of Social Work (MSW) program accredited by a national accreditation body comparable to the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) or the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE);
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete specified courses;
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully complete a comprehensive paper or examination, or the equivalent; and
- in order for the doctoral degree to be granted, the individual must successfully defend a dissertation or thesis.

ii. Compliance with Requirements regarding the Use of the Title "Doctor":

- Registrants who hold an earned doctorate in social work must ensure that their use of the title "doctor" is in compliance with the requirements under the SWSSWA, the regulations and the by-laws.
- The SWSSWA, the regulations and the by-laws provide, among other things, requirements related to how registrants describe or identify themselves in oral and written communications.
- The Standards of Practice, which are prescribed by by-law, have been amended in connection with the use of the title "doctor" and amendments made to the registration regulation.
- Registrants who hold an earned doctorate in social work must continue to identify themselves as College registrants and use the title "social worker" or "registered social worker", or the designation "RSW", or the title "social service worker" or "registered social service worker", or the designation "RSSW", as applicable, in addition to the title "doctor".

Registrants' responsibility to ensure they are permitted to use the title "doctor":

- A registrant is not required to request that the College determine whether they hold an earned doctorate in social work.
- However, it is a registrant's responsibility to ensure that they hold an earned doctorate in social work that meets the requirements of the SWSSWA and the criteria set out in the Policy, if the registrant uses the title "doctor" in the course of providing or offering to provide health care to individuals.
- Registrants may choose to refrain from using the title "doctor" if they are in doubt about whether they are permitted to do so; they may continue to identify their doctoral degree itself (e.g. Ph.D.) in these circumstances.

Circumstances in which a registrant is uncertain about whether they are permitted to use the title "doctor" in the course of providing or offering to provide, in Ontario, health care to individuals:

- A registrant may submit a written request to the Registrar for a determination as to whether or not the registrant holds an earned doctorate in social work. The Registrar will determine whether the registrant's doctoral degree in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution outside of Ontario is considered to be equivalent to a doctoral degree in social work granted by a post-secondary educational institution authorized in Ontario to grant the degree.
- The Registrar will generally make this determination, using the criteria set out in the Policy. The Registrar has the discretion, in the appropriate circumstances, to vary from the criteria.
- If the Registrar determines that a registrant does not hold an earned doctorate in social work, the registrant may appeal the Registrar's decision to the Titles and Designations Committee by filing with the Registrar a written notice of appeal within thirty days of being notified of the Registrar's decision.
- The Titles and Designations Committee will provide its decision in writing to the registrant and the Registrar.

Please Note:

Registrants who do not hold an earned doctorate in social work, as described above, may not use the title “doctor” in the course of providing or offering to provide health care in Ontario, although they may be able to use the title in other contexts which do not involve providing or offering to provide health care.

Review note: *This resource was updated in January 2023 solely to reflect the College’s shift in terminology, from “member” to “registrant”.*

Terminology update: *Throughout the OCSWSSW’s website and documents, the term “member” and “registrant” are used interchangeably and synonymously as equivalent to the term “member” as used in the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998, and the Regulations.*