



Communication to Members of OCSWSSW 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 member of the College 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 he or she complies 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 members who hold earned doctorates in social work.

This article is intended to provide members 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 member 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 member holds an earned doctorate in social work if the member meets **all** the requirements outlined in **either a), or b), or c) or d)** below.

a) A member of the College 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 member of the College 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 member 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 member of the College 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 member 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 member of the College 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 member 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”:

- Members 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 members 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.
- Members who hold an earned doctorate in social work must continue to identify themselves as members of the College 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”.

Members’ responsibility to ensure they are permitted to use the title “doctor”:

- A member is not required to request that the College determine whether she or he holds an earned doctorate in social work.
- However, it is a member's responsibility to ensure that she or he holds an earned doctorate in social work that meets the requirements of the SWSSWA and the criteria set out in the Policy, if the member uses the title "doctor" in the course of providing or offering to provide health care to individuals.
- Members 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 member is uncertain about whether she or he is permitted to use the title “doctor” in the course of providing or offering to provide, in Ontario, health care to individuals:

- A member may submit a written request to the Registrar for a determination as to whether or not the member holds an earned doctorate in social work. The Registrar will determine whether the member’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 member does not hold an earned doctorate in social work, the member 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 member and the Registrar.

Please Note:

Members 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.