

Titles and Designations

GLENDAL MCDONALD, MSW, RSW, REGISTRAR



Reprinted as a supplement from the Spring 2008 issue of Perspective, a semi-annual publication of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers.

From time to time the College receives inquiries regarding the titles and designations that must be used by College registrants. Common issues identified by registrants include the fact that their position title does not include the words “social worker” or “social service worker”. In these instances, registrants report that although their job responsibilities would be considered consistent with the scope of practice of social work or social service work, responsibilities of the position may also be compatible with other professional designations thus leading to somewhat generic position titles such as “intake worker”, “crisis worker” and “case manager”, to name a few.

Registrants have also queried when and what type of professional designation they should use when writing letters associated with their position. Similarly, registrants have asked if they must have “social worker” or “social service worker”, in addition to RSW or RSSW after their name on business cards.

Before directly addressing these questions, the relevant Regulations will be reviewed as will the rationale for the legislative framework relating to the regulation of the social work and social service work professions.

The Registration Regulation (O. Reg. 383/00) made under the Social Work and Social Service Work Act, 1998 (the “Act”) requires that College registrants use one of the following titles in connection with the practice of social work:

1. Social worker

2. Registered social worker
3. Travailleur social
4. Travailleur social inscrit

The Regulation further requires that a social work College registrant use the designation RSW or TSI in documentation used in connection with the practice of social work.

Similarly, the Regulation requires that registrants use at least one of the following titles in connection with the practice of social service work:

1. Social service worker
2. Registered social service worker
3. Technicien en travail social
4. Technicien en travail social inscrit

Social service work College registrants must use the designation RSSW or TTSI in documentation used in connection with the practice of social service work.

Additionally, according to the Professional Misconduct Regulation (O. Reg. 384/00) made under the Act, it is an act of professional misconduct for a College registrant to fail to identify oneself as a social worker or social service worker to a client when providing social work or social service work services.

The rationale behind these provisions in the regulations relates to the primary duty of the College to protect and serve the public interest. The requirements for the use of titles and designations are directly related to the title restriction provisions contained in the Act. As registrants know, the Act restricts the use of the titles “social worker”,

Titles and Designations

GLENDAL MCDONALD, MSW, RSW, REGISTRAR

“registered social worker”, “social service worker”, “registered social service worker” and their French equivalents to College registrants. The purpose of these restrictions, from the perspective of the public interest, is to enable clients and consumers of social work and social service work services to identify the regulated professional from whom they are receiving service. To the extent that consumers are knowledgeable about professional titles and qualifications, they are able to make informed choices regarding their service providers. Additionally, when clients are able to identify the regulated professional from whom they are receiving service, they are able to obtain information regarding the professional in particular or the profession in general. As registrants know, the Act requires that certain registrant information be contained in the Register of the College and is information that is available to the public. Any person can contact the College and request this information about a specific registrant. The College receives many requests from members of the public who wish to confirm that the person from whom they are receiving service is indeed a College registrant. Additionally, members of the public are able to receive general information respecting the registration requirements for College registrants, as well as the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice to which the College registrants will be held accountable.

Title restrictions can also be valuable to the professionals themselves as it enables one service provider to be distinguished from another. Indeed, the exclusive use of a title is a key component of professional self-regulation. It has been noted in previous articles in Perspective that professional regulation increases the public’s confidence in both professions. Individuals and organizations receiving services from social workers and social service

workers feel reassured that they are receiving services from professionals who abide by a code of ethics and standards of practice and who are competent in their field. Consumers also have the added assurance that these professionals are accountable to their regulatory body to act in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice and that they have access to the College’s complaints process, should this be necessary.

To return to the initial questions posed by our registrants, the Regulations are clear that registrants must use the designations RSW or TSI, in the case of social work registrants, or RSSW or TTSI, in the case of social service work registrants, in all documentation used in connection with their practice. For example, it is expected that a registrant’s business card will include the applicable designation. With respect to position titles, it must be noted that the College does not have jurisdiction over employers and cannot direct an employer to use or not to use certain position titles. However, if a registrant’s position title does not identify the registrant as a “social worker” or “social service worker”, it is then incumbent upon a College registrant to identify themselves to clients as registered social workers or registered social service workers in addition to their position title. By clearly identifying themselves as registrants of their professional regulatory body, registrants are demonstrating their commitment to professional regulation in the public interest.

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

Titles and Designations

GLENDAL MCDONALD, MSW, RSW, REGISTRAR

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.