

Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers

Standards in Health Care for Registered Social Workers in Saskatchewan

Introduction

The **Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers** (SASW) is the professional body for registered social workers that has regulatory responsibilities to ensure that the practice of social work is carried out competently and within the ethical guidelines of the profession. These standards are intended to be inclusive for all areas of health care including, but not limited to, acute care, mental health, long term care, and health care related to the special needs of specific disease or rehabilitation processes.

The ***Social Work Act (1993)*** has defined specific responsibilities, some of which include the following:

- providing for a code of professional ethics;
- setting standards of professional conduct, competency, and proficiency of members;
- setting standards regarding the manner and method of the practice of members.

Definition of Standard

The definition of a standard is a ... "***measure to which others should conform or against which others are judged.***" Standards in social work reflect the values of the profession and define expectations for social workers in the conduct of their duties.

Application of Standards

Some of the applications of standards are as follows:

- providing protection for the public by ensuring quality social work practice as defined by standards;
- creating the means by which self-regulation can be achieved by the profession within clearly defined expectations;
- establishing a set of references that can be applied in the conduct of practice and in the resolution of issues related to professional practice;
- creating administrative guidelines for hiring, performance appraisals, supervision, and management;
- providing legal reference for courts to judge the scope of practice and the expectations for social workers in the conduct of their duties;
- building sources of information for other professional groups and the general public about the work of the social work profession.

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Purpose of Health Care Standards

Social workers in health care work in a complex environment, requiring specialized knowledge in the area in which they are working including the effect of physical/emotional trauma, disease processes, drug reactions, and the impact of acute, chronic and terminal illness on the quality of life. Within this complexity of practice, we strive for excellence in quality of services, and will endeavour to effect social change to enhance quality of life.

The Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers has developed these standards for social work in health care settings for the following reasons:

- (1) These standards will provide clear statements about the values, principles, and the ethics upon which health care services are based and will define professional conduct in the delivery of these services by social workers.
- (2) These standards will outline responsibilities of supervisors, managers, and agencies providing health services in relation to carrying out their supervisory functions, building quality programs of service delivery, and creating a positive work environment.
- (3) These standards will be used by the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers as a means by which issues can be addressed on behalf of social workers working in health care facilities, consumers and the general public.

Preamble

Social workers believe that their professional relationship with the client(s) is the cornerstone of their work. The relationship embodies respect of the individual's worth and dignity, acceptance, honesty, confidentiality, and mutual participation in decision making.

This emphasis on relationship, combined with a holistic perception of the individual having a past, present, and future, becomes the basis for our unique contribution in health.

We see the "client" not just in the role of client, but as an individual(s) with competencies, challenges, and aspirations, living within a unique environment. Social workers believe the client has the ability and right to make decisions in all areas of his/her lives with the potential for positive or negative impact on their sense of physical, spiritual, and mental well-being.

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Competence

Health care social workers practice in diverse settings, requiring unique understanding and attributes, while at the same time, sharing a common text of knowledge, values, abilities, and skills, all existing in dynamic relationship with one another.

For the purposes of these standards, competence is seen as a pool of skills which are demonstrated in practice. These skills are necessary to carry out social work functions in health, and reflect the practitioner's ability to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into responsible and effective practice.

To practice competently in the area of health, the social worker must be a registered social worker and adhere to the CASW Code of Ethics and the Standards for Ethical and Professional Social Work Practice as developed by SASW.

In order to provide social work services in the diverse and specialized areas of practice, it is important social workers continue to increase their knowledge and skills. This can be achieved through offerings from the university, in-services, workshops, self-study, conferences, and consultation.

The intent of this document is constructive. It is the intention of the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers to use standards as a means of defining "best practice" and helping organizations achieve quality service delivery on behalf of the clients, their families, and the community.

These standards are meant to be applied to all areas of health. Social workers are employed in a variety of settings including residential care, home care, non-profit organizations, public agencies, and fee for service settings.

These standards are also meant to ensure that social workers upgrade their knowledge and skills in the area in which they provide social work services which include but are not limited to:

- (1) health care delivery systems - federal, provincial, and local levels;
- (2) social, cultural and psychological aspects of health and illness;
- (3) the effects on health of poverty and oppressive social attitudes including sexism, racism, and ageism;
- (4) disease processes;
- (5) drug reactions;
- (6) personal reactions to acute, chronic and terminal illness;
- (7) the optimum health and well-being of individuals given the diversity of societal and cultural meanings of illness and disability;
- (8) the effects of trauma for clients and relatives;
- (9) interdisciplinary team functioning and the ability to effectively communicate with all team members concerning the psycho-social aspects of health care;
- (10) the network of community services and resources appropriate for the particular area of practice and the ability to make effective community referrals;

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- (11) ability to advocate on behalf of the client,
and when appropriate, family members.

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Standard I - Values & Beliefs -

Social workers shall adhere to the following values and beliefs:

- (1) maintain the requirements provided in the *Code of Ethics* of the Canadian Association of Social Workers and the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers in Saskatchewan;
- (2) view the client as the focus of the care system and see the health of the client and the community as the purpose of providing service;
- (3) respect the right of the individual and family to participate fully in the choice of his/her care;
- (4) facilitate informed consent and decision-making by the client based on accurate and relevant information;
- (5) support efforts to facilitate social change. All services affecting the health of individuals and communities are inter-related i.e. poverty and all the related health issues, environmental health concerns like housing and water, and access to competent health services whether acute, chronic or long term;
- (6) strive to maintain and improve the quality and effectiveness of care within the team, program, department, and agency/department;
- (7) serve as an advocate for the client and a mediator between the client and the service delivery system.

Standard II - Provision of Social Work Services -

Social work services in health care settings shall be provided by social work staff as a part of the provision of comprehensive health care.

Measurable Criteria:

- *All social work positions will be filled by social workers registered with the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers.*

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Standard III
- Social Work Knowledge -

- (1) Social workers employed in health care settings shall have a minimum of a Bachelor's degree in social work from an accredited social work program or university recognized by CASW and/or the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work.
- non-profit agencies, and community programs that could be accessed by families;
- (2) Social workers employed in health care settings shall have a commitment to life-long learning and to maintain, at a minimum, the yearly requirements for continuing professional education as defined in both SASW and CASW standards of practice.
- (3) Social workers employed in health care settings shall possess knowledge and understanding that is basic to that system. Knowledge would include:
- 3.1 biological, psychological, and social development of children, adolescents, and adults and understand how this development can be impacted by the health care system;
 - 3.2 the importance of culture to children, families, and communities;
 - 3.3 the impact on families and communities resulting from poverty, addictions, violence, racism, and the loss of family, culture, or community;
 - 3.4 the impact of abuse and neglect on children, families, and communities;
 - 3.5 the range of legislation, policies, protocols and procedures that must be met in the delivery of health care services;
 - 3.6 the range of services offered by different departments of government,

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Standard IV - Competence -

3.7 case and cause advocacy, networking, coalition building, and community organization, as a means of achieving desired end-goals for families for wellness;

3.8 the purpose of supervision, consultation, and inter-disciplinary collaboration as a means of providing services;

3.9 how to access research data on health care services and how to use this information in day to day practice;

3.10 the health care setting shall be knowledgeable of the health care delivery system at a federal, provincial, and local level.

Measurable Criteria:

- *Ability to work independently in case management and link clients/significant others to appropriate resources*
- *Knowledge and ability to access policies and procedures regarding programs, benefits, and resources for clients, families, and communities*
- *Ability and skill to work with professionals on an inter-disciplinary team*

(4) Be knowledgeable of the effects of poverty and oppressive social attitudes and relationships such as sexism, racism, abuse, ageism, disabilities.

Measurable Criteria:

- *Ability and skill to work with clients, families, and communities with diverse backgrounds and circumstances in a manner that follows the Code of Ethics and*

- *promotes understanding and social acceptance as demonstrated through case record reviews, supervision, or consultation*

Social workers in health care shall have, maintain, and further develop, competence in the provision of social work services. In addition, the social worker shall not undertake to provide service unless she/he is competent to provide the service or can acquire the necessary skills without undue risk, delay, or expense to the client.

The social worker should be skilled in:

- 1.1 networking, coalition building, and community organization as a means to generate equal access to care, equitable professional service and assurance of standards of care;
- 1.2 working with professional inter-disciplinary teams within the health system and in promoting professional social work knowledge and skills;
- 1.3 understanding the disease process and gain necessary knowledge in providing social work services in the specific area of health care they are engaged in;

The social worker should know:

- 2.1 the limits of professional competence, and transfer cases that are beyond the level of expertise, experience, or personal ability of social workers to manage;
- 2.2 assessment and intervention within the comprehensive understanding of the person-in-environment concepts. The client's interpersonal needs are viewed as

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being interrelated with the environmental systems that impact their well-being.

Measurable Criteria:

- *Demonstrate ability in taking initiative to gain knowledge and skills in the particular area of social work practice such as chronic illnesses, specialties such as neurology, geriatrics, and understanding of the disease process at all ages through case management and consultation.*
- *Demonstrate ability in networking, coalition building, community organization and advocacy for clients and communities where access to services is lacking as documented in recordings and case management.*
- *Demonstrate ability in applying a variety of counselling skills including but not limited to family therapy, behavioral techniques, reality therapy, cognitive therapy, couple counselling, and psychotherapy.*

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Standard V - Social Work Records -

Social workers shall keep records in order to impart pertinent information to other members of the health care team. This information shall be kept secure from creation to disposal. Information gathered from a client or from other sources about the client shall be kept confidential and not be released to anyone without specific permission (preferably written) from the client except under powerful counter-indicating circumstance involving severe risk to the client or others or as required by legal statute.

The social worker shall:

- (1) maintain client records according to Standard VIII of the SASW Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers In Saskatchewan, including advocacy for the secure storage and disposal of client records;
- (2) follow the standards of confidentiality and informed consent as outlined in SASW's Standards of Ethical Practice for Professional Social Workers in Saskatchewan and the CASW Standards;
- (3) share information which will be time limited and specific;
- (4) inform all clients about their right to confidentiality and limitations of that right;
- (5) clarify the confidentiality and information sharing boundaries at the beginning of the professional relationship in situations where the client is a family or a group;
- (6) record on the client record only the information which other members of the health care team need to know in the provision of coordinated care;
- (7) instruct all parties working under their authority about confidentiality

Standard VI - Treatment of Clients

requirements.

Measurable Criteria:

- *Social workers, when asked, will demonstrate their practice in keeping client records is consistent with the Code of Ethics.*

Social workers in health care settings will treat clients with respect and ensure that barriers to communication within and between services are minimized.

- (1) In order to accomplish this standard, social workers shall:

- 1.1 develop and maintain knowledge and sensitivity about the impact that culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and social-economic factors have on client ability to seek and use health services;
- 1.2 use language and terminology that is understandable to the client and delivered in the language of the client (whenever possible) and provide adequate information about services;
- 1.3 discuss the benefits and any foreseeable risks with clients before a service or particular intervention strategy is agreed upon. The client has the right to refuse intervention;
- 1.4 recommend the least intrusive psycho-social intervention available to assist in the remediation of client problems while respecting the rights of clients to self determination.

Measurable Criteria:

- *The social worker will demonstrate this respect in their practice through at least one of the following - chart review, supervision*

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Standard VII - Obligation of Health Care Facilities -

The mandate for health care facilities in Saskatchewan is established through legislation which establishes provincial standards for health care. SASW considers these standards a vital part of providing health care services.

SASW has the legislative mandate to set standards for its members. The Association expects that workers will meet or exceed these standards in their practice. Employers also have an obligation to the public and to their employees to establish the conditions of employment that enable social workers to meet these standards of practice. While SASW recognizes that it has no jurisdiction to enforce work-place standards, the Association regards work-place conditions to be a critical element in the delivery of quality services.

Agencies who provide health care services should incorporate the following provisions:

- (1) integrate into the work of the agency the requirements provided in the *Code of Ethics* of the Canadian Association of Social Workers, and the SASW *Standards of Ethical Practice for Social Workers in Saskatchewan*;
- (2) ensure that supervisors, managers, and senior staff of the organization understand, support, and implement the values of the social work profession;
- (3) demonstrate sensitivity and responsiveness to the ethnic and cultural differences of families throughout all levels of the organization - administrative, supervisory, support, and direct service staff;
- (4) maintain equality of services in accordance with the Charter of Rights & Freedoms;

- (5) build a learning environment within the organization by which social workers can gain information about all aspects of health services and delivery;
- (6) provide quality supervision for social workers by supervisors with a Master of Social Work degree, at least five years of field experience, and training in supervision of staff (whether on site or by consultation);
- (7) ensure that social workers have the opportunity and support to obtain a minimum of 40 hours of training per year for educational purposes;
- (8) facilitate the participation of administrative, supervisory, advocacy, networking, coalition building, and community organizations designed to support patients/families;
- (9) provide support for social workers to protect their physical and mental health;
- (10) establish means by which current research and new information coming into the field can be accessed routinely as part of the work of the organization;
- (11) create a positive work-place environment that is committed to safety, well-being, and respect.

Date Approved: March 2001