

# **SOCIAL WORKERS REGISTRATION BOARD**

## **Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers**

### **PREAMBLE**

In accordance with Section 10 of the Social Workers Registration Ordinance (Chapter 505), the Social Workers Registration Board approves and issues this Code of Practice for Registered Social Workers “for the purpose of providing practical guidance in respect of the professional conduct (including ethical matters relating to such conduct, of social workers)”.

The primary objective of the Code of Practice is for the protection of clients<sup>(1)</sup> and the members of society at large. To enhance public trust and confidence in the social work profession, the issue of a code of practice is essential.

This document serves as a guide to the everyday conduct of social workers. Under section 11 of Social workers Registration Ordinance, this Code of Practice will be used as a basis for adjudication when the conduct of a social worker is alleged to have violated the standards specified in this document. It represents standards of ethical behaviour for social workers in professional relationships with clients, with colleagues, with agency, with profession, and with society as a whole. It is applicable to any professional conduct of social workers.

Social workers are required to cooperate in the implementation of this Code of Practice and abide by any disciplinary rulings based on it. They should also keep abreast of the laws of Hong Kong which may be amended from time to time. Social workers should take adequate and appropriate measures and action to prevent, discourage, correct, or expose the unethical conduct of other social workers. They should also take reasonable and appropriate measures to monitor all staff under their supervision and other persons assisting them in delivering service not to violate the Code of Practice or jeopardize the interest of clients<sup>(2)</sup>.

## **PART 1 – BASIC VALUES AND BELIEFS**

- 1 Social workers' primary mission is to help people in need and to strive to address social problems.
- 2 Social workers respect the unique value and dignity of every human being irrespective of one's ethnicity, colour, family/social/national origin, nationality, culture, birth, sex, age, language, beliefs, political and other opinion, family/social/economic status, disability, educational attainment, contribution to society, or sexual orientation.
- 3 Social workers believe that individuals have the potential to develop and thus accepts a responsibility to encourage and facilitate the self-realization of individuals with due regard to the interest of others.
- 4 Social workers accept responsibility to advance social justice and to safeguard the cause of human rights.
- 5 Social workers believe that each society, regardless of its form, should provide maximum benefits to its members.
- 6 Social workers accept responsibility to update, upgrade and devote their professional knowledge and skills to the betterment of individuals and society, with the aim to empower people to act on their own behalves as far as possible.
- 7 Social workers recognise the central importance of human relationships and seek to strengthen relationships among people in a purposeful effort to promote, maintain and enhance the well-being of individuals, families, social groups, organizations and communities for the prevention and relief of hardship and suffering.

## **PART 2 – PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

### **Related to Clients**

#### **Responsibility**

- 1 Social workers have a primary responsibility to the clients.

### **Cultural Awareness**

- 2 Social workers should recognise the ethnic and cultural diversity of the communities being served.
- 3 Social workers should be acquainted with and sensitive to the cultures of clients and appreciate the differences among them in respect of their ethnicity, national origin, nationality, religion and custom.

### **Informed Decision and Self-determination**

- 4 Social workers acknowledge a responsibility to inform clients of their rights and help them to obtain appropriate services. Clients should also be informed of, as far as possible, obligations and possible consequences associated with services provided to them.
- 5 Social workers should clearly inform clients, who are using services under compulsion, of their rights as well as the limits of their rights and assist them in attaining as much autonomy as possible.
- 6 Taking into account the limit of clients' rights to self-determination, social workers should encourage clients to participate as far as possible in decision-making about the goals, alternatives and services available to them.

### **Use of Information and Principles of Confidentiality**

- 7 Social workers should respect clients' right to privacy and confidentiality of their information, subject to other statutory requirements including, in particular the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap.486). They should also, as far as possible, fully inform clients of the limits of confidentiality in a given situation, the purpose for which information is obtained, and how it may be used.
- 8 In disclosing case materials, social workers should make necessary and responsible efforts to remove all identifying information and to seek consent, as far as possible, from the client and the relevant agency.
- 9 Social workers should take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information transmitted to other parties through the use of electronic media. Disclosure of identifying information should be avoided whenever possible.
- 10 Social workers should inform clients of the limitation and risks associated with such services provided via electronic media.

11 Social workers should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured.

12 Social workers should protect the confidentiality of clients during legal proceedings to the extent permitted by law.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

13 Social workers should not abuse the worker-client relationship in pursuit of personal interests.

### **Sexual Relationship**

14 Social workers should under no circumstances be engaged in any sexual activities or sexual contacts with clients, whether such activities or contacts are consensual or forced.

15 Social workers should not provide clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship.

### **Continuation of Service**

16 If and when a fee for service is required, social workers should ensure that clients would not be denied timely services they need because of financial constraints.

### **Billing Practice**

17 Social workers should establish and maintain billing practices that accurately reflect the nature and extent of services provided. Those being engaged in private or independent practice should also enable such billing practices to identify who has provided the service in the practice setting.

18 Social workers should clearly inform clients of all fee rates and charges before services are delivered.

## **Related to Colleagues**

### **Respect**

19 Social workers should pay due respect to different opinions and practices of

other social workers, other professionals and volunteers. Any suggestion or criticism should be expressed and conflicts resolved in a responsible manner.

### **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

- 20 Social workers should discharge duties and treat co-workers, irrespective of which organizations they are from, in a fair and professional manner.
- 21 Social workers should collaborate as far as possible with other social workers and colleagues from other disciplines to enhance service effectiveness.
- 22 Social workers who are members of an interdisciplinary team should participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of clients by drawing on the perspectives, values, and experiences of the social work profession. They should induce and help the interdisciplinary team as far as possible to clearly define the professional and ethical obligations of the team as a whole and of individual team-members.
- 23 Social workers on whom a team decision raises ethical concerns should attempt to resolve the disagreement through appropriate channels. If the disagreement cannot be resolved, social workers should pursue other appropriate avenues to address their concerns consistent with clients' well-being.

### **Supervision and Training**

- 24 Social workers, who provide supervision or professional consultation, should possess and maintain necessary knowledge, skills and methodology through appropriate education, training, consultation and research to facilitate them to perform the tasks in professional supervision and training competently. Social workers should provide training or instructions only within their areas of knowledge or competence.
- 25 Social workers who provide supervision should recognise a supervisor's educational, supportive, developmental and work-focused role and should not abuse the professional relationship with supervisees for any interests.
- 26 Social workers who provide supervision should monitor their supervisees to act in accordance with this Code of Practice.

### **Consultation**

- 27 Social workers should seek the advice and counsel from colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interests of clients.

- 28 Social workers should seek consultation only from colleagues who have demonstrated knowledge, expertise, and competence related to the subject of the consultation.
- 29 Social workers, for the purpose of consulting with colleagues about clients, should provide information on clients on a need-to-know basis.

### **Clients' Right of Choice**

- 30 Social workers respect clients' right of choice. With due respect to other agencies and colleagues, they should not solicit the clients of other social workers.

### **Communications between Co-workers**

- 31 Without the explicit permission of the author of the communications between co-workers, social workers should not convey to clients any contents of such communications that are beyond the scope of the clients' personal particulars.

### **Sexual Relationship**

- 32 Social workers who function as supervisors or educators should not be engaged in any sexual activities or sexual contacts with supervisees, students, or trainees over whom social workers exercises professional authority.

## **Related to Agency**

- 33 Social workers should be responsible to the employing agency for the efficient and effective performance of professional duties.
- 34 Social workers should act constructively and responsibly to influence and to improve policies, procedures, and practice of their employing agencies in order to continuously improve the quality of service and to prevent social workers from violating this Code of Practice when enforcing agency policies.
- 35 Social workers should make clear in any public statements or when undertaking public activities whether they are acting in a personal capacity or on behalf of a group or an organization.
- 36 Social workers should not use institutional affiliation to recruit clients for

private practice without the consent of the institution.

## **Related to Profession**

### **Professional Responsibilities**

- 37 Social workers should maintain honesty, integrity and responsibility in professional practice.
- 38 Social workers should uphold the values and ethics, and advance the knowledge of the profession.
- 39 Social workers should bring to the attention of appropriate bodies any violation of this Code of Practice that may put the interests of clients at risk, and should be ready to defend other social workers against unjust accusations.

### **Competence**

- 40 Social workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, professional consultation, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.
- 41 Social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after being engaged in appropriate studies, training, professional consultation, and supervision by people who are competent in those interventions or techniques.
- 42 When generally recognised standards do not exist with respect to an emerging area of practice, social workers should exercise careful judgment and take responsible steps, including appropriate education, research, training, professional consultation, and supervision, to ensure the competence in their work and to protect clients from harm.

### **Respect**

- 43 In criticizing the profession, social workers should do so in a responsible and constructive manner.

### **Representation**

- 44 Social workers should make no misrepresentation or false claim as to personal particulars, professional qualifications, credentials, education, competence, nature of service, and method of service or results to be achieved.

### **Independent Practice**

- 45 Social workers who are engaged in private or independent practice should practise only within their areas of competence and offer suitable referrals when clients' needs go beyond their areas of competence. Any publicity on their practice should be made based on the actual qualifications, experience and expertise.

### **Professional Development**

- 46 Social workers should accept responsibility for upgrading their professional skills and knowledge.
- 47 Social workers should take responsibility to help those who are entering the profession to establish, strengthen and develop their ethics, values, skills and knowledge.

### **Call to Duty**

- 48 Social workers should respond to calls to duty<sup>(3)</sup> when an explicit request is made and when a call is made specifically for social workers on the spot to render certain service under specific circumstances.

### **Related to Society**

- 49 Social workers recognise the need to bring to the attention of policy makers or the general public any policies, procedures or activities of governments, societies or agencies which create, contribute to, or militate against the relief of hardship and suffering.
- 50 Social workers recognise the need to advocate changes in the formulation of policies and legislation to improve social conditions, to promote social justice and general welfare of the society. Social workers also recognise the need to contribute to the implementation of policies for human welfare and should not allow one's knowledge, skills or experience to be used to further unjust policies or inhuman practices.

- 51 Social workers recognise the need to prevent and eliminate discrimination, and the need to strive for a more reasonable distribution of resources and to ensure that all persons should have equal opportunity to access to the necessary resources and services.
  - 52 Social workers recognise the need to promote conditions that encourage respect for diversity of cultures in the society.
  - 53 Social workers recognise the need to encourage informed participation by the public in formulating and developing social policies and institutions.
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**Notes**

- (1) *“Clients” refers to direct service recipients currently receiving individual, group services or programme activities provided by social workers.*
- (2) *“Interest of clients” – Social workers should make professional judgement after considering and striking a balance among the interests of clients and those of other related bodies (including family members, agency, community and society, etc.).*
- (3) *“Call to duty” in this context is not applicable to calls made through mass media to social workers at large.*

*(Remark: Chinese version prevails over English version if there is any discrepancy.)*

First gazetted on 16 October 1998

Amended on 15 January 2010

Part 2 Paragraph 7 amended on 15 November 2013