CURRENT ISSUES IN SOCIAL WORK
ETHICS

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ETHICAL STANDARDS

- Ethical Responsibilities to Clients
- Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues
- Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings
- Ethical Responsibilities as Professionals
- Ethical Responsibilities to Broader Society
PURPOSE OF A CODE OF ETHICS
(BIRKENMAIER, ET. AL.)

• Affirms social work as a legitimate profession

• Provides guidance for practice circumstances

• Sets standards by which public can hold professionals accountable

“Hasn’t the public a right to know how the ordinary social worker is likely to act under ordinary circumstances?”
The Compass, April 1924
WHY DO WE NEED A CODE OF ETHICS?

- Moral development
- Ethical humility
- Values
CORE VALUES FROM NASW CODE OF ETHICS

- Service
- Social Justice
- Dignity and Worth of the Person
- Importance of Human Relationships
- Integrity
- Competence
IDENTIFYING WHEN A DILEMMA IS PRESENT
ETHICAL DILEMMAS

• Occur when an individual has to choose between two or more conflicting ethical standards.

• An ethical dilemma is even more challenging when personal values and professional ethical obligations conflict.
DOES THE DILEMMA MEET CRITERIA OF A PROFESSIONAL DILEMMA?

1) The social worker must decide on a course of action
2) Multiple courses of action exist
3) Regardless of the course of action, one of the social work ethical principles will be compromised
   (Allen, 2012, p. 4)

- As you review these challenges, consider your own value system, your potential responses, and the intersection of the two.
PATERNALISM AND CLIENT SELF-DETERMINATION

• Paternalism refers to process of interfering with clients self determination because the worker believes he/she has a better understanding of what is in the clients best interest

  • Withholding information from clients
  • Deliberately lying to a client
  • This can also include providing too much assistance rather than letting client develop problem solving skills

(Birkenmaier, et. Al.)
RESPONSIBILITY TO LARGER SOCIETY AND CLIENT WELL BEING

• Client’s right to privacy vs. benefit to the community of making issues public
  • Child abuse, domestic violence, elder exploitation

• Striking a balance between promoting public’s welfare and honoring the wishes of individuals can be challenging
  • Ex. Reporting exploitation of an elderly person by their child, against their wishes
  • encouraging someone who has been sexually assaulted to report to police
  (Birkenmaier, et. Al.)
CONFIDENTIALITY AND DUTY TO PROTECT

• In this case, Duty to Protect outweighs our responsibility to maintain client confidentiality.

• N.D. Century Code states that any person who reasonably believes that a vulnerable adult has been subjected to abuse or neglect or observes conditions or circumstances that reasonably would result in abuse or neglect must report the information to the department or to an appropriate law enforcement agency.
RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION AND ACTING IN CLIENTS BEST INTEREST

• Self Determination comes from the core value of Dignity and Worth of the Person

• Our need to act in a client’s best interest comes from the core value of Service (Bryan, et. Al.)
COMMON DILEMMAS WITH ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS
ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS FROM NASW CODE OF ETHICS

- Commitment to Clients
- *Self Determination
- Informed Consent
- Competence
- Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
- *Conflicts of Interest
- *Privacy and Confidentiality
- Access to Records
- Sexual Relationships
- Physical Contact
- Sexual Harassment
- Derogatory Language
- Payment for Services
- *Clients Who Lack Decision Making Capacity
- Interruption of Services
- Termination of Services
“Social workers should take precautions to ensure and maintain the confidentiality of information transmitted to other parties through the use of computers, electronic mail, facsimile machines, telephones and telephone answering machines, and other electronic or computer technology. Disclosure of identifying information should be avoided whenever possible.”

(NASW Code of Ethics)
MODELS FOR ETHICAL DECISION MAKING
ETHIC MODEL OF DECISION MAKING

- **E**: Examine relevant personal, societal, agency, client and professional values
- **T**: Think about what ethical standard of the NASW code of ethics applies, as well as relevant laws & case decisions
- **H**: Hypothesize about possible consequences of different decisions
- **I**: Identify who will benefit and who will be harmed in a social work’s commitment to the most vulnerable
- **C**: Consult with supervisor and colleagues about the most ethical choice
LOEWENBERG’S ETHICAL DECISION MAKING MODEL

Prioritized from Highest to Lowest:

1. Protection of Life
2. Equality and Inequality
3. Autonomy and Freedom
4. Least Harm
5. Quality of Life
6. Privacy and Confidentiality
7. Truthfulness and Full Disclosure
REFERENCES

• Hardy, M. (2013). Ethics In-service [PPT]. Beach, ND.