

For discussion  
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**Legislative Council  
Panel on Welfare Services**

**Professional Autonomy of Social Workers  
in the Provision of Subvented Community Development Services**

**Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the provision of subvented community development services and social workers' professional autonomy in the delivery of such services.

**Background**

2 In pursuit of its policy area of district community relations, Home Affairs Bureau commissions the Social Welfare Department (SWD) as its delivery agent to provide community development services in the form of group and community work in community centres and neighbourhood level projects through subvention to non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

3 Resources are allocated to the community development service units under the Lump Sum Grant (LSG). Under the LSG subvention system, SWD stresses on output instead of input monitoring for subvented NGOs who are accountable for the use of LSG to fulfil the requirements specified in the Funding and Service Agreements (FSAs) as agreed and signed with SWD. At the same time, NGOs are given flexibility in deploying subventions and manpower to meet the service needs and are expected to exercise their corporate governance for effective management. Under corporate governance,

the NGO Boards are responsible to set the mission and goals of the NGOs, ensure proper budgeting and use of public money, well manage their human resources, determine service delivery modes to ensure meeting the changing needs of the community.

4 Neighbourhood Level Community Development Projects (NLCDPs) are implemented by subvented NGOs in transient communities where the provision of community facilities and welfare services are inadequate or non-existent. The NLCDPs aim to address local service needs and foster a spirit of mutual help and a sense of belonging to the community among the residents.

5 The NLCDP service operators should ensure that NLCDP teams follow the performance standards as defined in the FSA. The FSA includes the agreed levels of different standards such as the total number of service delivery hours in a year; total number of community programmes and community groups attendance, residents' contact in a year and service quality standards.

6 As in the case of the provision of subvented social services in general, as long as NGOs comply with the requirements including the Essential Service Requirement specified in the FSA, (e.g. service units manned by registered social workers), they are allowed to deploy subventions and manpower in a flexible manner so that services to be delivered to the community can best meet changing community needs. Besides, the approach for service delivery is within the autonomy of the NGOs. While social workers have to be registered under the Social Workers Registration Ordinance (Cap. 505) including those of the NLCDPs', there is no stipulation by the Government as to how their work should be conducted, and the registered social workers have the professional autonomy in conducting their daily work. As a guide to the conduct of professional social workers, a Code of Practice for

Registered Social Workers was issued by Social Workers Registration Board for the observance of registered social workers (Annex).

**Home Affairs Bureau/Social Welfare Department  
September 2009**

# **Social Workers Registration Board**

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

3 October 1998

### **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 the purpose of providing practical guidance in respect of the professional conduct of registered social workers (including ethical matters relating to such conduct).

The primary objective of the Code of Practice is for the protection of clients and other members of society. In order 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 a Registered Social Worker (social worker). In accordance with Section 11 of the 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 violate the standards specified in this document. It represents standards of ethical behaviour for a social worker in professional relationships with clients, with colleagues, with agency, with profession, and with society as a whole. It is applied to all the individual conduct which is associated with an individual's status as a social worker.

Social workers are required to cooperate in the implementation of this code and abide by any disciplinary rulings based on it. Social workers should take adequate measures and action to prevent, discourage, correct, or expose the unethical conduct of colleagues. Social workers should take reasonable and appropriate measures to ensure all staff under their supervision and persons assisting them (including volunteers) to avoid violating the Code of Practice and harming the benefits of clients.

### **Basic Values and Beliefs**

- (1) The social worker's primary mission is to help people in need and to strive to address social problems.
- (2) The social worker respects the unique value and dignity of every human being irrespective of one's family origin, ethnicity, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, age, family status, beliefs, political affiliation, mental and physical abilities, social and economic status or contribution to society.
- (3) The social worker believes 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) The social worker accepts responsibility to advance social justice and to safeguard the cause of human rights.
- (5) The social worker believes that each society, regardless of its form, should provide maximum benefits to its members.
- (6) The social worker accepts responsibility to devote 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) The social worker recognizes the central importance of human relationships and seeks 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.

## **Principles of Practice**

### Related to Clients

- 1) The social worker has a primary responsibility to the clients.
- 2) The social worker acknowledges a responsibility to inform the 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.
- 3) The social worker should inform clients fully, as far as possible, about the limits of confidentiality in a given situation, and the purpose for which information is obtained, and how it may be used. In publication of case material, the social worker should make the necessary and responsible efforts to remove all identification information and to seek consent, as far as possible, from the client and the employing agency.
- 4) The social worker should not abuse the worker-client relationship in the pursuance of personal interests.
- 5) The social worker should not have sexual contact with client(s).
- 6) If and when fee for service is required, the social worker should ensure that the clients would not be denied timely services they need due to financial constraints.

### Related to Colleagues

- 1) The social worker should pay due respect to the differences of opinion and practice of other social workers, other professionals and volunteers. Any suggestion or criticism should be expressed and conflicts resolved in a responsible manner.
- 2) The social worker should co-operate as far as possible with other social workers to enhance service effectiveness.
- 3) The social worker should bring to the attention of appropriate bodies any violation of the Code of Practice that puts the interests of social work service recipients at risk, and should be ready to defend other social workers against unjust accusations.
- 4) The social worker respects the clients' right of choice and should not, with due respect to other agencies and colleagues, solicit the clients of other social workers.
- 5) For joint practice, confidential communication other than that related to the clients that are shared by other co-workers should not be conveyed to clients without the explicit permission from the authors of such communications.

### Related to Agency

- 1) The social worker should be responsible to the employing agency for the efficient and effective performance of professional duties.
- 2) The social worker should act constructively and responsibly to influence and to improve policies, procedures, and practice of the employing agency in order to continuously improve the quality of service and to prevent the social worker from violating the Code of Practice when enforcing agency policy.
- 3) The social worker should make clear in any public statements or when undertaking public activities whether one is acting in a personal capacity or on behalf of a group or an organization.
- 4) The social worker should not use institutional affiliation to recruit clients for private practice without the consent of the institution.

### Related to Profession

- 1) The social worker should maintain honesty, integrity and responsibility in professional practice.
- 2) The social worker should uphold the values and ethics, and advance the knowledge of the profession.
- 3) In criticizing the profession, the social worker should do so in a responsible and constructive manner.
- 4) The social worker should make no misrepresentation and/or false claim as to professional qualifications, nature of service, method of service or results to be achieved.

- 5) The social worker should accept responsibility for upgrading his/her professional skills and knowledge.
- 6) The social worker should take responsibility to help those who are entering the profession to establish, strengthen and develop their ethics, values, skills and knowledge.

#### Related to Society

- 1) The social worker recognizes 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.
- 2) The social worker recognizes 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. The social worker also recognizes 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.
- 3) The social worker recognizes the need to prevent and eliminate discrimination and recognizes 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.
- 4) The social worker recognizes the need to promote conditions that encourage respect for diversity of cultures in the society.
- 5) The social worker recognizes the need to encourage informed participation by the public in formulating and developing social policies and institutions.

**(Remarks : Chinese version prevails English version if there is any discrepancy)**

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Note 1 Clients

Referring to direct service recipients (including their immediate family members and next of kin) receiving individual, group services or program activities provided by the social worker.

2 Interest of clients

Social workers should make professional judgement after considering and levelling the interest of clients and other related bodies (including family members, agency, community and society, etc.).