

Rationale for

Continuing Professional Development

Social work is a highly skilled discipline that works with complex and often emotionally charged situations, balancing the needs, wishes and rights of a range of people and human systems. Social workers are legally required to engage in CPD to be compliant with their Code of Professional Conduct & Ethics¹. Section 10 requires that social work registrants:

- a. *ensure that your knowledge, skills and performance are of a high standard, up to date and relevant to your practice*
- b. *participate in continuing professional development (CPD) on an ongoing basis.*

CPD and the reflective processes underpinning it are essential to the practice and development of the social work profession to ensure the ongoing safe and effective delivery of social work services. It is essential to positive experiences and outcomes for service users and patients as well as to interdisciplinary teamwork. CPD is about the application of knowledge, rather than its acquisition.

CORU define Continuing Professional Development (CPD) as *“the means by which health and social care professionals maintain and improve their knowledge, skills and competence, and develop the professional qualities required throughout their professional life.”* The knowledge, skills, competencies and professional qualities required by social work are necessarily broad in nature. Trevithick (2007) conceptualises the knowledge base of social work *“in terms of three interweaving features: theoretical knowledge (or theory), factual knowledge (including research) and practice knowledge (including practice/practical/personal knowledge and experience)”*. The knowledge base in social work also requires that social workers listen to and understand the knowledge that service users bring to the working relationship. Social work requires the embodiment of knowing about and knowing how, the weaving of facts, theory and practice.

While some kinds of knowledge can be learned or developed through formats such as lectures and webinars or online, it is necessary for other skills and knowledge to be

¹ The goal of the SWRB is to protect the public by fostering high standards of professional conduct, education, training and competence among registrants.

developed in person, with peers. For example, section 7 of the SWRB Code states “You must know and work within the laws, regulations and guidelines governing your practice and keep up to date with any changes in legislation or regulation or guidelines”. The factual knowledge of legislation is one kind of knowledge needed. However, the practice of skilfully applying legislation in practice is knowledge of a different kind that can only be developed through learning and reflection with peers. An exclusive emphasis on facts and technical ‘know-how’ ignores the knowledge that professionals generate through reflection in and reflection on professional practice (Halton, 2016). Reflection is a way of making sense and meaning out of professional practice taking responsibility to shift, change and transform social work services to be more effective.

As a defining characteristic of professional practice, reflective practice is central to all stages of CPD if engagement in analysis of experiences is to lead to new insights into oneself and/or one’s practice. CPD is an integral component in the continuing provision of safe and effective services for the benefit of service users. (CORU)

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