Ethics in Health Care Social Work: Not an Optional Extra

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Acknowledgement

- Griffith University acknowledges the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land. The University pays respect to the Elders past and present, and extends that respect to other Indigenous Australians.

Placing health care ethics in context

Some things never change

Defining ethics:

Rights

Responsibilities

Duties

Obligations

- The responsibility to Do No Harm
- The obligation to professional integrity
- The duty to uphold social justice and human rights
- The rights of clients/patients/service users to quality service, privacy and confidentiality, to give informed consent, to be treated with respect, to not be discriminated against, to have cultural issues acknowledged

Moving with the times

- Some things have become more important than ever before

- Being ethically literate
- Being ethically congruent
- Being digitally aware
- Being collegial

Ethical Literacy: Speaking the language of ethics

- Health literacy: the wide range of skills and competencies that people develop to seek out, comprehend, evaluate, and use health information and concepts to make informed choices, reduce health risks and improve quality of life.

- Ethical literacy: the wide range of skills and competencies that people develop to seek out, comprehend, evaluate, and use information about values, to make informed choices, reduce ethical risks and improve quality of practice.

Strategies for developing and maintaining ethical literacy

- Develop your professional ethics library
- Stay in touch with relevant ethics journals
- Consciously use the language of ethics
- View social issues through an ethical lens
- Write case notes, records and reports with an eye to ethical dimensions

Ethical congruence

- The importance of 'knowing oneself ethically'
- Being in situations of continued value challenge can be exhausting and lead to disconnection and withdrawal

- Strategies:
- Professional supervision, mentoring and support
- Ensure that you have a good 'fit' between your values and those of your workplace
- Be clear about your own ethical position on controversial issues, practice giving a rationale for your position, and seek out knowledge, evidence, research and lived experience

Digital awareness

- E-Professionalism: 'the development of an online persona that is congruent with the values and ethics of the profession and portrays use of self in a way that is respectful and demonstrates professional integrity' (Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2014).

- We need to be aware of:

- Our own digital footprint and ways that we use technology and social media both personally and professionally

- How we work in online service delivery and what skills and knowledge we need to maintain competence

- What the emerging issues are for social work practice as a result of rapid advances in technology

Strategies for staying 'digitally savvy'

- The digital world is here to stay. Learn how to use it ethically.

- Interrogate your own digital footprint regularly (and those near and dear to you) – make sure you know what others can see.

- Be clear in expectations about online relationships and maintain appropriate boundaries.

- Promote your professional profile using professional social media sites. Keep your personal for personal.

- Deal with 'digital dirt' promptly. Safeguard your reputation – and the reputation of social work.

Being collegial

- Social work in health care is an inter-professional endeavour.
- Understand that good collegial relationships form the best buffer against work-related stress.

Strategies for building collegial relationships:

- Make the time to talk with others about what they do – where is the common ground, where are the tensions?
- Consider interdisciplinary peer-mentoring groups for discussion of ethical dilemmas.
- Explore possibilities for inter-professional training.
- Develop good knowledge of how to manage collegial problems.

Collegial Conversation

What does a collegial conversation
- sound like?
- look like?
- feel like?

Being Wise, Brave and Human

- A **wise** practitioner will always engage with critical reflection so that they take nothing for granted; so that they remain aware that no two situations will automatically demand the same response; and so that they explore every situation for evidence of structural disadvantage or potential injustice.

- A **brave** practitioner will not remain silent when there is a need to speak out, or take a stand, on a principle that upholds professional ethical responsibilities.

- Being **human** is to acknowledge one's own history; the impact of our experiences; our biases and prejudices; our socialised value patterns and emotional triggers; and our capacity for vulnerability and fears about insufficient knowledge and skill. Being human allows practitioners to engage with others at a deeper level so that they can become 'a whole greater than the sum of its parts'.