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PREFACE

SOCIAL WORKERS' understanding of professional values and ethics has matured considerably in recent years. During the earliest years of the profession's history, social workers' attention was focused primarily on cultivating a set of values upon which the mission of social work could be based. Over time the profession has nurtured and refined a set of values that has given tremendous meaning and purpose to the careers of generations of social workers. Social work's enduring commitment to vulnerable and oppressed populations, and its simultaneous preoccupation with individual well-being and social justice, are rooted in the profession's rich value base.

But the lens through which social workers view values and ethics has changed dramatically over time. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that social workers now look at these issues through several lenses, not just one, and that the angles of these lenses periodically shift in response to cultural developments and trends. Today's social workers face issues involving values and ethics that their predecessors in the profession could not possibly have imagined. What social worker, in the early twentieth century, could have anticipated the magnitude of the debates about the ethical issues for social workers that have emerged from the AIDS crisis or the complex privacy and confidentiality issues facing social workers who use e-mail, Facebook, and other Internet tools to serve clients? What social worker in the 1930s could have forecast the ethics debate about social workers' role in the use of animal or artificial organs to save a dying client's life or ethical problems created by cutting-edge psychopharmacology and electronic monitoring of certain clients?

Especially since the late 1970s, a growing number of social work scholars and practitioners have been studying, exploring, and debating issues involving values and ethics in the profession. Literature on social work values and ethics,