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,

presentations at professional conferences, and instruction on the subject in undergraduate and graduate social work programs have increased dramatically. Today's students and practitioners have access to vastly more knowledge and education related to social work values and ethics than did their predecessors. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that social work's exploration of these issues has increased exponentially.

The same is true in other professions. In professions as diverse as journalism, medicine, engineering, accounting, business, law, psychology, and nursing, practitioners and scholars have devoted increasing amounts of attention to the subjects of values and ethics. For a variety of reasons, which I shall explore shortly, members of these professions have come to recognize the critical importance of these issues and their immediate relevance to practitioners' work.

The wide variety of complicated issues involving values and ethics in social work and other professions has emerged along with the invention of an entire field of study whose purpose is to help identify, explore, and address the kinds of problems professionals encounter in these areas. Applied and professional ethics (also known as practical ethics) began to take shape in the early 1970s, primarily as a result of the explosion of ethical issues in medicine and health care. Since that time scores of scholars and practitioners have studied the relevance of values and ethics to the professions, debated ethical problems in the professions, explored the relevance of ethical concepts and theories to the kinds of ethical dilemmas that arise in professional practice, and improved education and training in these areas.

Such has been the case in social work as well. The vast majority of literature on social work values and ethics has been written since the mid-1970s. Although many significant publications appeared earlier, most of the in-depth scholarly exploration of these subjects has occurred since then. In addition, most presentations at professional conferences, training sessions in social service agencies, and undergraduate and graduate education on the subject have occurred since that time, too.

Thus today's social workers have access to a far wider range of information and knowledge related to values and ethics than did earlier generations of practitioners. Times have changed dramatically in this respect, and the profession's literature must keep pace. Contemporary social workers must be acquainted with advancing knowledge related to the profession's values and the kinds of ethical issues and challenges that practitioners encounter.

Social Work Values and Ethics has been written with this purpose in mind. This book is designed to provide social workers with a succinct and comprehensive overview of the most critical and vital issues related to professional

values and ethics: the nature of social work values, ethical dilemmas and decision making, and ethics risk management. *Social Work Values and Ethics* puts between two covers a summary of compelling knowledge, topics, and debates that have emerged throughout the profession's history, emphasizing the issues that are most pressing in contemporary practice. The book acquaints readers with the core concepts they need to identify and investigate the wide range of complex issues involving values and ethics faced by today's social workers.

Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the values and ethical issues in social work and a brief history of the profession's attempts to address them. This is followed by an in-depth examination in chapter 2 of the nature of social work's core values and the relevance of the profession's value base to clinical practice (the delivery of services to individuals, couples, families, and small groups) and macro practice (agency administration and management, social advocacy, community organizing, and policy practice).

A significant portion of this book is devoted to complex ethical dilemmas in social work. These are situations in which social workers are challenged by conflicting ethical duties and obligations, circumstances that generate considerable disagreement and debate. Chapter 3 provides a conceptual framework for thinking about and exploring ethical dilemmas and ultimately making difficult ethical decisions. This chapter includes a practical outline and concepts to help social workers approach ethical decisions. It also includes a detailed summary and overview of the current version (2008) of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an overview of a wide range of specific ethical dilemmas in social work. Chapter 4 focuses on ethical dilemmas in clinical practice with individuals, couples, families, and small groups of clients. In contrast, chapter 5 focuses on ethical dilemmas in macro practice, that is, ethical dilemmas encountered in social work administration, social advocacy, community work, and in social welfare policy.
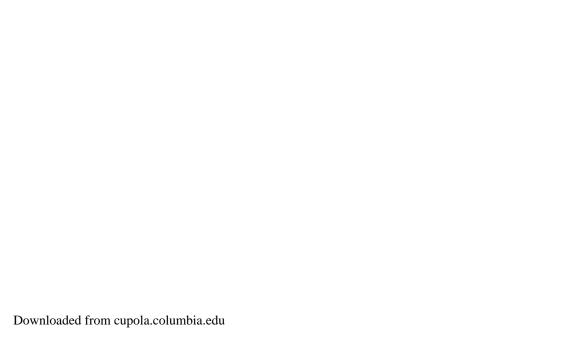
Among the issues involving social work's values and ethics are the problems of malpractice, unethical behavior, and professional misconduct. Social workers sometimes are named in ethics complaints or lawsuits that allege some kind of ethics-related negligence or misconduct (for example, unethical management of professional boundaries or inappropriate disclosure of confidential information). In a few instances social workers have been charged with and convicted of criminal conduct (for example, sexual involvement with a client, billing for services that were not provided). The good news is that many such problems are preventable. Thus chapter 6 provides readers with an overview of the nature of professional misconduct and of the ways in which social workers can become entangled in ethics

complaints and lawsuits, a summary of the most common problems in the profession, and various prevention strategies.[1]

Social work values and ethics have come of age. It is a privilege to be able to provide readers with an introduction to what constitutes the heart of social work's noble mission.

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1. Case examples are provided throughout this book. With the exception of instances in which case material is a matter of public record, circumstances have been altered and pseudonyms have been used to ensure anonymity.

SOCIAL WORK VALUES AND ETHICS

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SOCIAL WORK VALUES AND ETHICS

An Overview

IMAGINE THAT you are a social worker at a local community mental health center. You spend most of your time providing supportive and casework services to individuals and families experiencing some sort of difficulty. You have worked at the agency for about three years.

During the past two months you have provided counseling to Sarah Koufax and her two children, Brooks, seven, and Frank, four. Sarah Koufax originally sought help at the agency because of difficulty she was having managing Brooks's behavior. According to Sarah Koufax, Brooks "frequently throws temper tantrums when he's upset—he can really kick and scream." Sarah Koufax also reported that Brooks's teacher said she was having a great deal of difficulty controlling the boy and wanted to discuss whether he should be transferred to a different classroom, one for difficult students.

You have spent considerable time teaching Sarah Koufax various ways to handle Brooks's behavior, particularly the use of positive reinforcers. During the past few weeks Sarah Koufax has reported that his tantrums have been less frequent and that he has responded well to the positive reinforcers. Brooks's teacher has also reported that the child's behavior has "improved somewhat."

Throughout your relationship with Sarah Koufax she has talked at length about some of her own difficulties—single parenthood, financial problems, and her struggle with alcoholism. In recent weeks she has been especially eager to discuss these problems. In your judgment you and she have developed a constructive, trust-filled relationship.

Yesterday morning you received a telephone call from Sarah Koufax. She was clearly distraught and said she needed to see you as soon as possible, that she could not wait for her regularly scheduled appointment later in the week.