

Preface and Acknowledgments

THE SEED FOR THIS PROJECT was planted in January 2001. From a chance encounter at the Society for Social Work and Research, Terry learned of funding for educational projects related to death and dying in social work practice. Terry had extensive experience writing, editing, and teaching M.S.W. students using decision cases, and he enlisted Vicki to help create a proposal for this collection. Vicki had written and taught using decision cases and, more significantly for this project, had nearly twenty years of experience in end-of-life social work practice. Work formally began in 2002, with grant funding from the Soros Foundation's Project on Death in America. We are very grateful to the foundation for funding this project and to Project Director Grace Christ for direction and encouragement. In addition, we benefited from annual retreats with the other grant recipients, where we became acquainted with and learned from many of the social work leaders in the area of death and dying. Their contributions have greatly enriched this collection.

The cases in this book are based on field research with professional social workers. Although they must remain anonymous, we are deeply grateful for their time and effort in giving interviews and reviewing case drafts, and for their openness with us throughout the writing process. The interviews required that they recall and reflect upon situations they often found personally challenging, even disturbing. They were not always proud of or pleased with their responses, but nevertheless persevered in sharing their experiences for the benefit of students. Without endorsing all their perceptions or reactions, we consistently found these social workers to be caring, competent, and ethical practitioners. If they were otherwise, their cases would be less compelling. Obviously, the case collection would not be possible without these professionals and their deeply personal contributions.

We found most of the cases by asking experienced social workers about memorable dilemmas they had experienced in professional practice. In a few instances, professionals familiar with decision cases volunteered to report

cases when they learned about the project. We sought cases from a variety of professional settings, both those obviously associated with death and dying and those where the association is unexpected, because we wished to provide a curriculum resource broadly applicable to social work education. For the same reason, we sought cases portraying a variety of intervention levels, from direct practice to supervisory and administrative practice. As a result, particular cases can be used across the social work practice curriculum or in courses focused on death and dying.

We researched and wrote the cases using a highly collaborative process developed by a friend and colleague, Mike Welsh (1999). It involved repeatedly assembling small groups of social workers as case-writing teams led by the authors. Teams typically met for initial reporting sessions lasting 90 to 120 minutes. The case-writing process consisted of 5 steps. First, the case reporter prepared a brief written account of a problem or dilemma he or she actually faced in social work practice. Second, during the initial team meeting, the case reporter told the story in detail. Other team members asked questions to elicit information about the situation on multiple levels (e.g., intrapersonal dynamics, interpersonal and social relations, organizational factors, policy issues). These reporting sessions were tape recorded to collect detailed descriptions and quotations of dialogue. Third, immediately after the initial team meeting, a case writer prepared a working draft of the case that included a title, an introductory “hook,” a basic narrative, and a dilemma-posing ending. Fourth, at a subsequent meeting or via e-mail, the case writer distributed the working draft to other members of the team, who asked further questions of the case reporter to correct, clarify, or amplify the case. Fifth, the case writer used the additional information that emerged from this discussion to revise the case. In addition, analysis from the follow-up discussion was used to prepare teaching notes for the completed case. This writing process promoted in-depth collaboration with experienced practitioners from a variety of social service settings.

The cases are carefully disguised to protect the confidentiality of the case reporters, clients, co-workers of the case reporters, and organizations. For example, cases may be placed in other states, in organizations with fictitious names, and of course all names of individuals have been changed. However, in order to maintain the integrity of each case and portray the issues and dynamics as accurately as possible, we have tried to retain details such as

ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status of individuals, characteristics of the community, personal history and characteristics of the individuals as it affected their interactions, and so on, either very close to or unchanged from the actual situation.

Many of the case coauthors were students or former students, and several were faculty colleagues. For everyone, Terry provided formal instruction or at least written guidelines and informal guidance for writing decision cases and teaching notes. More than other forms of academic writing, decision cases require an unusual combination of technical expertise and familiarity with practice settings. Details matter. Sometimes, for example, a decision turns on a seemingly minor fact, a matter of timing, or an overlooked policy. For that reason, it was important to collaborate with practitioners in this project.

We enjoyed collaborating on this project with several social work students, graduates, and faculty colleagues. As M.S.W. graduate assistants, Carmella Barton, Heather Bennett, Gecole Harley, Llorra Negro, Rachel Parker, Laura Poindexter, and Jeannette Ucci worked on the project in various capacities, including case coauthorship. Laura Cox, Rich Schlauch, and Georgianne Thornburgh were M.S.W. graduates who also coauthored cases. Now social work instructors themselves, Sarah Cearley, Barbara Head, and Mary Hylton coauthored cases as doctoral students. Miriam Johnson and Karen Gray are faculty colleagues who also teach the case-based M.S.W. capstone course at the University of South Carolina College of Social Work

After completing a draft of each case and the accompanying teaching note, we solicited a review by an expert consultant familiar with death and dying and sometimes also by a second expert consultant familiar with the particular field of practice in which it took place. For serving as reviewers, we wish to thank Elizabeth Mayfield Arnold (Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center), Mercedes Bern-Klug (University of Iowa), Susan Blacker (St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto), Cheryl Brandsen (Calvin College), Elizabeth K. Chaitin (University of Pittsburgh Medical Center), Darienne DeSalvo (Family and Children's Service of the Capital Region, Albany, NY), Sheila R. Enders (University of California Davis Cancer Center), Cynthia Forrest (Winthrop University), Barbara Head (University of Louisville), Barbara Jones (University of Texas at Austin), Johnny Jones (University of South Carolina), Betty J. Kramer (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Shanti Kulkarni (University of Texas at Austin), John F. Linder (University of California Davis Cancer Cen-

ter), Julie Miller-Cribbs (University of Oklahoma), Joan Pendergast (University of South Carolina), Pat W. Priest (Lutheran Family Services, Greensboro, NC), Mary Raymer (Raymer Psychotherapy and Consultation Services, Acme, MI), Steve Walker (Richland County [SC] School District One), and Sherri Weisenfluh (Hospice of the Bluegrass, Lexington, KY).

Collaboration with case reporters, coauthors, graduate assistants, expert consultants, and external reviewers helped to ensure the veracity and readability of the cases and the thoroughness of the teaching notes. We and others have already piloted many of these cases—in an M.S.W. capstone course, an M.S.W. elective on death and dying, and continuing education workshops for social work practitioners or instructors—and we used those experiences to refine the cases and notes. We cannot guarantee the absence of substantive errors but trust they will be minor as a result of these multiple forms of collaboration and review.

Finally, we wish to thank several people connected with Columbia University Press. Series editor Virginia Richardson (Ohio State University) welcomed our book prospectus and put it forward as part of the Press's series on end-of-life care. Executive editor Lauren Dockett guided the prospectus through multiple levels of internal review, two anonymous external reviewers helped us clarify and elaborate the project, and copyeditor Leslie Kriesel corrected and clarified our writing at many points.

We hope these accounts will stimulate and intrigue you. More importantly, we hope they will provoke significant learning and growth, better preparing you for professional practice with people who, like you, will face dying, death, and bereavement.