

TO INSTRUCTORS

Terry A. Wolfer

As explained in “Introduction to the Cases,” the decision cases in this collection differ from the cases commonly used in social work education. No matter what your experience with case method teaching or professional social work practice, you will probably appreciate the extensive teaching notes written for each of the cases. These notes are available for instructors at the Columbia University Press website (<http://www.cup.columbia.edu/wolfer-teaching-notes>) or by emailing instructors@columbiauniversitypress.com.

The teaching notes have two basic purposes: first, to help you select particular cases for class use and, second, to help you prepare to lead class discussions about those cases. To help select a case, each teaching note begins with a case synopsis, intended case use, and possible learning outcomes. To prepare for class discussion, each teaching note provides possible discussion questions and responses. These questions and responses are organized into four sequential categories: facts, analysis, action, and personal reflection. Next, the note includes suggestions regarding possible activities—for use before, during, or after

the class—to supplement the case discussion. A final section identifies recommended print, electronic, and media resources.

TO STUDENTS

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As explained further in “Introduction to the Cases,” the cases in this collection came from social workers who told us about their experiences. In considerable detail, the cases depict difficult and challenging situations these social workers actually encountered in professional practice. By both length and complexity, these cases differ from those often published as “vignettes” in social work textbooks. They are more like the situations you will encounter in your field placement or employment or you might hear about in case conferences or peer supervision.

Furthermore, these cases are like the situations you will encounter professionally in another important way: they end at a point where the social worker protagonist must decide how to respond. Traditional social work cases in textbooks often illustrate practice theories or interventions, demonstrating how something should work. In contrast, these cases depict messy, unresolved situations. As a result, they allow you to analyze the situation and decide what to do. Indeed, if you must discuss these cases or write a case analysis for a social work course, they require you to analyze the situation carefully and draw your own conclusion about what needs to be done. Your classmates and instructor may offer