



Ethical Practice

Critical Thinking Question:

Why is it considered a moral duty of social workers to provide evidence-based practice?

You should have questions about what you are doing. Similarly, your field instructor should be interested in how you are doing and should want to know about the progress of your cases. Your direct, private supervision should be no less than one or two hours a week and should include suggestions from the field instructor regarding other approaches, strategies, and theories, perhaps including information about how the field instructor handled a similar situation (more on how to make the best use of supervision in Chapter 4).

Unlike volunteers, who may work as much or little as pleases them, students must spend a specified number of practicum hours in their assigned agencies. Both volunteers and students need their supervisors to agree to their proposed schedules before starting in the agency. Sometimes days and hours are negotiated—one day might be more convenient than another. This contrasts rather markedly with the employee who is told the days and exact hours to work. Employees may be given little choice in tasks or responsibilities to perform. Agencies expect more from employees than from students or volunteers in productivity and knowledge about their jobs. But then, of course, employees are generally rewarded financially for their trials and tribulations.

In some situations, clients accept volunteers more easily than they do students. One undergraduate volunteering in a mental hospital explained:

The patients were more accepting of me when I was a volunteer because they believed I came to the hospital not because I had to, but because I cared and wanted to be with them. They saw students as being interested in them as subjects for research rather than as individual human beings.

Students placed in residential facilities may find that residents resent students who come into their lives and then leave abruptly at the end of the academic term.

Unlike employees and students, volunteers are seldom evaluated. Generally speaking, there are never enough volunteers in agencies, and even inept volunteers are often tolerated. Volunteers may be informed that their services

Where Boundaries Are Likely to Be Found

At the agency level	Is it a public or private agency? To whom is the agency accountable? How are services funded? What is its history, philosophy, and mission? How is it structurally organized? How important is it to keep good records?
At the program level	Are certain programs selective—choosing their participants from the larger client pool? Does participation in one program preclude participation in others?
At the client level	Who is eligible to be a client? What are the expectations of proper client behavior? How do clients typically interact with staff? What kind of demands can clients make on staff? When are clients referred?
At the staff level	Do some staff have more clout or more privileges than others? What informal rules exist regarding staff behavior toward clients? What is considered unethical behavior? Who supervises whom? How important is it to be accountable for one's time?

are no longer needed if they are unreliable (e.g., they do not show up on the days expected or do not accomplish assigned tasks). Students, on the other hand, are usually formally evaluated at the midpoint and toward the end of their academic terms. Social work students' experience in the practicum is guided (and to some degree regulated) by their learning contracts, which specify educational goals and objectives. Faculty field liaisons ensure that meaningful learning is occurring and help troubleshoot any problems that develop.

Students sometimes feel that they are being treated as free labor. For instance, one student complained bitterly when she was asked (in a residential setting) to help with some of the housekeeping chores. However, all of the paid staff were expected to perform certain menial chores to keep the facility clean and neat. The student was not being asked to do anything that staff members themselves did not do. However, students should be concerned when most assignments seem to be unrelated to professional responsibilities. If you think that you are being unjustly treated because you are a student, then you have a legitimate complaint that you should share with your field instructor. On the other hand, if you are being assigned an unpleasant chore or responsibility that other staff members also perform or take turns doing, you probably have little reason to complain.

Case Example

Jim shows up for the first day of his practicum and discovers that the agency is closed to clients. The whole agency is in a retreat because of a recent reorganization. He finds his field instructor, who invites him to accompany her to a series of staff meetings. At times the discussion becomes heated. Junior staff members disagree with their supervisors. Jim does not think that this is proper and by noon is beginning to wonder if he has made a mistake in selecting this agency. By 3:00 P.M., however, things seem to have smoothed out, and a genuine sense of camaraderie is evident. In fact, staff members have decided to come into the agency on Saturday, on their own time, to have a clean-up, fix-up day. Because their maintenance and improvement budget has been severely cut over the past three years, they intend to paint several offices on their own and to wash windows both inside and out.

Questions

1. Should Jim also volunteer to work on Saturday?
2. What would be the advantages of getting to know the staff members on an informal basis?
3. What if Jim already had plans to go out of town?
4. Should he feel that it is beneath his dignity to wash windows or paint?

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM MEETINGS?

Many students will have the opportunity to participate on interdisciplinary teams often found in hospitals, nursing homes, schools, rehabilitation centers, and prisons. As a rule, the student's role initially will be that of observer until the student has a case to present or is asked to become more involved by the field instructor or other team members. This will usually happen after the student has had occasion to work with or observe clients being discussed by the team.