

Code of Professional Ethics Federal Council Report

Formulation of the Code

The aims in setting up a code of professional ethics and providing machinery by which it can be implemented are two-fold. Firstly, one of the services which the Association can offer its members is guidance on matters of professional ethics, by means of a ready channel of consultation with respected members of the profession chosen for this particular role. Problems concerning professional ethics may arise for members in relation to a choice of conduct or a direction from an employing agency. Secondly, such a code aims at protecting the effective functioning of the profession from the destructive effects of unethical behaviour among its members. Unfortunately the disciplinary function of the code has received more attention because it has to be defined more carefully, but this should not obscure what is expected to be the code's primary function — that of guidance and support to members.

Over a decade passed between the initial efforts of the Association towards formulating a code of ethics and the adoption of the present code by Federal Council in May 1965. In 1957, an interim code was adopted for experimental use for a period of at least two years. In 1959 the Queensland branch became responsible for a sub-committee to collate reports from the states on the interim code, on the basis of which it circulated yet another draft. During the next four years the pressure for a final code increased, and one Association conference devoted a session to the subject, but further progress was hindered by some important disagreement, some points of which are indicated below. In 1964 a sub-committee of Federal Council was formed to reconcile the differences in a final draft; after discussion by branches and some lively debate in Federal Council, a further amended draft was adopted in May 1965 with a considerable sense of achievement among all those concerned.

One basic matter of disagreement concerned the scope and function of any proposed code. It was felt by some — particularly some church members — that such a code could not set down rules for the ethical conduct for members who were directed by their religious beliefs or philosophical convictions, and that it was exceeding the rightful functions of a professional association to try to do so. In the light of this objection the scope of the code

was seen in more limited terms, as indicated by the title 'code of professional ethics', so that it clearly claims to cover only conduct related to professional responsibilities.

A second basic issue was the degree to which the private lives of members should be subject to regulation by the code and hence to disciplinary action for its infringement. A closely related question is how much members' conduct should be judged by public reaction — a very significant question when one considers the predicament of social workers in countries where obeying the civil law may infringe such basic professional principles as respect for all persons without discrimination. Hence the wording of Clause 8 of this code was framed with both these questions in mind, and it is directed only at 'personal behaviour which damages the functioning of the profession in accordance with the values stated in this code'.

In framing other clauses, a balance had to be found between the rights and wellbeing of the individual and those of society in relation to professional responsibilities, methods of working (social action being mentioned specifically), such principles as self-determination and confidentiality, and in channelling censure of members themselves.

The increasing variety of the application of social work training had to be kept in mind in framing such Clauses as the one on legitimate payment for services, this being an example of the need for flexible wording to maintain the intended principle without hindering expansion or experimentation in the roles of social workers and their employment status.

Implementation of the Code

By a 'case law' process the experience of the Association in implementing the code should accumulate and offer increasing guidance for future requests for advice on discipline. For this reason some records must be kept, but the procedure must be designed to ensure the maximum protection to members against rash or misguided accusations, and the maximum confidentiality in obtaining advice.

The procedure described below is not yet the officially accepted policy of the Association in implementing the code. It is a draft resulting from detailed discussion by Federal Council on the basis of Branch comments, but must still be returned to the Branches for further

consideration before a final decision by Federal Council can be made. Therefore, it must be remembered while reading these procedures that so far they represent a proposed scheme only.

Appointment of Branch and federal Professional Ethics Committee

The function of these committees is of course only an advisory one and the authority of the Association remains vested in its executive bodies, the Branch Committee of Management and the Federal Executive.

For this vital function of our professional body we want to draw on the wisdom of experienced members and also allow them to accumulate experience in this particular responsibility, and so unrestricted rights to re-appointment are suggested.

A Professional Ethics Committee of three members would be appointed by each Branch, appointed formally by the Committee of Management but chosen by the general membership. Each member would be appointed for three years with unrestricted opportunity for re-appointment, and staggered appointments of one member each year would provide continuity. The Branch President and Secretary would have the right *ex officio* to participate in meetings, and additional *ad hoc* members could be appointed by the committee itself, but only the three members chosen by the whole membership would have the power to make recommendations.

The federal Professional Ethics Committee would consist of three members. The first would be the Federal President, or if he were unavailable or personally involved one of the vice-presidents as appointed by the federal office-bearers. The second would be appointed by the Federal Council for two years (the term of appointment for federal office-bearers) with unrestricted eligibility for re-appointment. The third person would be appointed by federal office-bearers for each specific matter dealt with, after asking for the recommendations of the two standing members of the committee and after consulting with the Committee of Management of any branch concerned.

Consultative and Advisory Activity

This aspect of the work of Professional Ethics Committees requires only general definition. When advice is requested by members or agencies, local matters would be dealt with by Branch committees and matters of national scope would be referred to the Federal committee for advice. Reports on requests received

would be made in a general way at least to the appropriate executive body, but identifying details would be withheld if requested by the persons concerned. If approval was given, appropriate cases would be reported fully for the information of the general membership.

Disciplinary Activity

The first stage of handling any complaint made about a member would be a 'preliminary assessment' by the branch Professional Ethics Committee, which would then make a recommendation to the Committee of Management as to whether a full enquiry was warranted. This decision would be made by the Committee of Management by means of a secret ballot. A full enquiry by the Professional Ethics Committee would result in a further recommendation to the Committee of Management, this time on the appropriate action to be taken (and the reasons for this), and again the decision would be made by the executive.

Disciplinary action by a state Branch without consultation at federal level would be limited to a letter of reprimand or warning to a member, of which an identified copy would be kept only in the files of the Professional Ethics Committee. If a Branch Committee of Management, advised by its Professional Ethics Committee, feels that a member should be expelled, it must apply to Federal Council for ratification of this decision. Before doing this, Federal Council would refer the matter to the federal Professional Ethics Committee for consideration. It would also notify the member concerned of his right to appeal, ratification being delayed for three months to allow the member to give notice of any such intention by the end of this time. A somewhat longer time limit would be set for the actual presentation of an appeal.

Records and Review

To build up 'case law' on professional ethics throughout the profession, each Branch must keep the federal Professional Ethics Committee fully informed of its activities, and the federal committee must report on branch and federal activity no less often than each biennial meeting of Federal Council. Such reports would include any appropriate recommendations on the code itself or its implementation indicated by experience or changing circumstances. (For example the setting up of state registration bodies would require a review of our procedures). Another aid to the integration of Branches' activity in this field would be meetings of state convenors and as many members

as possible of state and federal Professional Ethics Committees at each national conference of the Association.

Once the machinery for implementing our code is set up, it needs to be tested. Without suggesting that members deliberately infringe the code for the purpose, I would urge them

to take every suitable opportunity for using at least the consultative channels provided, so that we can add to the code of professional ethics the accumulated wisdom of professional experience.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Preventive Medicine for Nurses and Social Workers: by J. B. Meredith Davies, English Universities Press. 186 pp. \$1.35.

The main interest in this small but remarkably comprehensive book lies in the account it gives of the provisions made within the British health and social services to prevent and control disease and to alleviate its effects. In the preface Dr Davies expresses the hope that the book will 'give an easily understood introduction to that important part of the health service — how to avoid breakdown in physical and mental health'. This is the only attempt to define preventive medicine, and leaves the author free to deal with the subject very broadly with the result that allied topics such as rehabilitation of the handicapped are included.

Most of the material is presented within the framework of the National Health Service in Britain, but there are also chapters on international control of disease, with special reference to the work of the World Health Organization.

The book opens with a description of the structure of the health services followed by a useful chapter explaining health statistics. The rest of the material is grouped in various ways — sometimes according to the people concerned, as in the chapters on maternal and child care and care of the aged, sometimes according to the nature of the disease such as infectious, non-infectious and mental, and sometimes according to methods of prevention and control as in the chapters on immunization, health education and legislation controlling food production, air pollution etc. The concluding chapter suggests future developments in preventive medicine.

To fit all this into 186 pages is quite an achievement and it is obvious that a good deal of detail has to be sacrificed. One section which suffers in this regard is that relating to industrial medicine, which is dealt with very briefly and is not treated as a subject in its own right. Elsewhere some statements appear to be medically illogical because the author fails to give psychological or social explanations. Apart from these lapses the lack of detail is quite acceptable in a book which aims to be no more than an introduction.

Because the book is essentially a description of British provisions its value in Australia will be limited. Some of the measures described cannot be carried out here because the facilities are not generally available on a national basis although they might be provided in some areas. Many of us will find that home helps or residential schools for the handicapped are not so readily available as they appear to be in Britain. On the other hand some measures suggested for the future, such as screening programmes, are apparently more advanced in parts of Australia than they are in Britain. There are

differences, too, in the prevalence of types of disease. Hydatids, for instance, which are a definite menace in parts of Australia, barely merit mention in this book.

The value of health visitors is stressed frequently, and this is the main group to whom the book appears to be directed, but it should prove useful to social work students in Britain, to social workers who intend to work there and to anyone interested in the planning of health services.

D. PEARCE

New Developments in Casework Vol II Social Work with Families Vol. I: Edited by Eileen Younghusband, published by George Allen & Unwin. Australian price, \$4.25 each volume.

These companion volumes should grace every Social Worker's library because they contain an extremely good collection of articles by outstanding Social Workers on both sides of the Atlantic.

In Volume I Younghusband has put together a series of articles which gradually builds up and enriches one's concept of the family. At the beginning we are introduced to family theory and the reader is asked to consider what is a 'normal' family. Goldberg gives several case illustrations to present this idea of the healthy or unhealthy 'fit' in the family interaction. Grace Coyle develops this theory further by writing about the family's group identity and then Lily Pincus' article locates the inception of the family's mode of interaction squarely in the relationship between the spouses.

The reader then moves into a practical series of articles where specific problems are examined — Levine discusses an interesting idea of home treatment by 'demonstration' for the cases of multi-problem families. Pauline Shapiro reports the results of what seems a worth-while student study project on family structure and children's play. She concludes that 'coping' families provide for constructive and imaginative play for their children, but the malfunctioning 'non copers', although they may buy toys for their children, do not encourage imaginative play and the children are consequently under foot and a nuisance to the adults.

Throughout the book, treatment of a nurturing nature is given high priority — 'Social work is here faced with the challenge of becoming a rearing, binding, super-ego-demanding profession rather than a liberating one. (Pollak).

In one of the articles in Volume I, Pollak, after referring to the fact that verbal communication on a fairly sophisticated level is a preferential condition for the selection of clients or patients and their successful treatment, makes the following statement