The 10 Core Competencies of Social Work

Educational Policy 2.1.1—Identify as a professional social worker and conduct oneself accordingly.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work recognize the importance of the therapeutic relationship, the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives, the professional use of self with clients, and adherence to ethical guidelines of professional behavior. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- readily identify as social work professionals;
- demonstrate professional use of self with client(s);
- understand and identify professional strengths, limitations and challenges;
- develop, manage, and maintain therapeutic relationships with clients within the person-in-environment and strengths perspectives.

Educational Policy 2.1.2—Apply social work ethical principles to guide professional practice.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work are knowledgeable about ethical issues, legal parameters, and shifting societal mores that affect the therapeutic relationship. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- apply ethical decision-making skills to issues specific to clinical social work;
- employ strategies of ethical reasoning to address the use of technology in clinical practice and its effect on client rights;
- identify and use knowledge of relationship dynamics, including power differentials; and
- recognize and manage personal biases as they affect the therapeutic relationship in the service of the clients’ well-being.

Educational Policy 2.1.3—Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments.

Advanced practitioners understand and differentiate the strengths and limitations of multiple practice theories and methods, clinical processes, and technical tools, including differential diagnosis. They deconstruct theories and methods to evaluate how they relate to clients and client systems within their environmental context. They regularly question and reflect on their own assumptions and consider how these might affect practice. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- engage in reflective practice
- identify and articulate clients’ strengths and vulnerabilities;
- evaluate, select, and implement appropriate multidimensional assessment, diagnostic, intervention, and practice evaluation tools;
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of multiple theoretical perspectives and differentially apply them to client situations; and
• communicate professional judgments to other social workers and to professionals from other disciplines, in both verbal and written format.

Educational Policy 2.1.4—Engage diversity and difference in practice.

Advanced practitioners are knowledgeable about many forms of diversity and difference and how these influence the therapeutic relationship and clients’ presenting issues. Advanced practitioners are knowledgeable about the ways in which various dimensions of diversity affect (a) explanations of illness, (b) help-seeking behaviors, and (c) healing practices (Cal-SWEC, 2006). Advanced practitioners are cultural beings and understand how clinical practice choices can be culture-bound. Advanced practitioners:

• research and apply knowledge of diverse populations to enhance client wellbeing;
• work effectively with diverse populations; and
• identify and use practitioner/client differences from a strengths perspective

Educational Policy 2.1.5—Advance human rights and social and economic justice.

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work understand the potentially challenging effects of economic, social, and cultural factors in the lives of clients and client systems. Advanced practitioners understand the stigma and shame associated with disorders, diagnoses, and help-seeking behaviors across diverse populations. They also understand strategies for advancing human rights and social and economic justice in domestic and global contexts. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

• use knowledge of the effects of oppression, discrimination, and historical trauma on client and client systems to guide treatment planning and intervention; and
• advocate at multiple levels for mental health parity and reduction of health disparities for diverse populations.

Educational Policy 2.1.6—Engage in research-informed practice and practice-informed research.

Advanced clinical practitioners are knowledgeable about evidence-based interventions, best practices, and the evidence-based research process. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

• use the evidence-based practice process in clinical assessment and intervention with clients;
• participate in the generation of new clinical knowledge, through research and practice; and
• use research methodology to evaluate clinical practice effectiveness and/or outcomes.

Educational Policy 2.1.7—Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment.

Advanced practitioners understand how to synthesize and differentially apply the theories of human behavior and the social environment (biological, developmental, psychological, social,
cultural, and spiritual). They are familiar with diagnostic classification systems used in the formulation of a comprehensive assessment. Advanced practitioners understand how socio-cultural contexts influence definitions of psychopathology. They have a working knowledge of psychotropic medications that are typically used in the treatment of mental health disorders, including expected results and side effects. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- synthesize and differentially apply theories of human behavior and the social environment to guide clinical practice;
- use bio-psycho-social-spiritual theories and multi-axial diagnostic classification systems in formulation of comprehensive assessments; and
- consult with medical professionals, as needed, to confirm diagnosis and/or to monitor medication in the treatment process.

**Educational Policy 2.1.8—Engage in policy practice to advance social and economic well-being and to deliver effective social work services.**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work recognize the connection between clients, practice, and both public and organizational policy. Advanced practitioners have knowledge about factors that influence the development of legislation, policies, program services, and funding at all system levels. They have knowledge of advocacy methods that contribute to effective policies that promote social and economic well-being. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- communicate to stakeholders the implication of policies and policy change in the lives of clients;
- use evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in advocacy for policies that advance social and economic well-being; and
- advocate with and inform administrators and legislators to influence policies that impact clients and service.

**Educational Policy 2.1.9—Respond to contexts that shape practice.**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work are knowledgeable about how relational, organizational, and community systems may impact clients. They anticipate and react to evolving cultural, technological, geographical, political, legal, economic, and environmental contexts. They encourage clients to effect changes within these contexts. Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- assess the quality of clients’ interactions within their social contexts;
- develop intervention plans to accomplish systemic change; and
- work collaboratively with others to effect systemic change that is sustainable.

**Educational Policy 2.1.10(a)–(d)—Engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.**

Professional practice involves the dynamic and interactive processes of engagement, assessment, intervention, and evaluation at multiple levels. Social workers have the knowledge and skills to practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Practice knowledge includes identifying, analyzing, and implementing evidence-based interventions designed to achieve client goals; using research and technological advances; evaluating program outcomes
and practice effectiveness; developing, analyzing, advocating, and providing leadership for policies and services; and promoting social and economic justice. Clinical social work practice involves the dynamic, interactive, and reciprocal processes of therapeutic engagement, multidimensional assessment, clinical intervention, and practice evaluation at multiple levels. Advanced practitioners have a theoretically informed knowledge base so as to effectively practice with individuals, families, and groups. Clinical practice knowledge includes understanding and implementing practice theories (models, meta-perspectives, strategies, techniques, and approaches); evaluating treatment outcomes and practice effectiveness.

**Educational Policy 2.1.10(a)—Engagement**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- develop a culturally responsive therapeutic relationship;
- attend to the interpersonal dynamics and contextual factors that both strengthen and potentially threaten the therapeutic alliance; and
- establish a relationally based process that encourages clients to be equal participants in the establishment of treatment goals and expected outcomes.

**Educational Policy 2.1.10(b)—Assessment**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- use multidimensional bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment tools;
- assess clients’ readiness for change;
- assess client coping strategies to reinforce and improve adaptation to life situations, circumstances, and events;
- select and modify appropriate intervention strategies based on continuous clinical assessment; and
- use differential and mult-iaxial diagnoses.

**Educational Policy 2.1.10(c)—Intervention**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- critically evaluate, select, and apply best practices and evidence-based interventions;
- demonstrate the use of appropriate clinical techniques for a range of presenting concerns identified in the assessment, including crisis intervention strategies as needed; and
- collaborate with other professionals to coordinate treatment interventions.

**Educational Policy 2.1.10(d)—Evaluation**

Advanced practitioners in clinical social work:

- contribute to the theoretical knowledge base of the social work profession through practice-based research; and
- use clinical evaluation of the process and/or outcomes to develop best practice interventions for a range of bio-psycho-social-spiritual conditions.