

From the Chief Inspector, Social Services Inspectorate
Mr Paul Martin



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

An Roinn

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

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Date: 22 September 2005

Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Social Care Council
Chief Executive, HPSS Regulation and Improvement
Authority
Chair, Central Personal Social Services Advisory
Committee
Chair, BASW (NI)
General Secretary, NIPSA
General Secretary, UNISON
Chair, NAPO (NI)

Dear Colleague

GOOD PRACTICE IN CONSENT – SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

Teaching and learning in a social work context, with direct service user, carer and family contact, is an important part of courses for all social work students. All HPSS and many voluntary sector organisations facilitate such contacts for the social workers of the future. However, service users, or as appropriate their representatives, for example in relation to children, must be asked for their consent for students to observe or to implement any aspect of a programme of care, including assessment of need and risk, care planning, care provision and care review processes.

It is recognised that social work practice also involves assessment of complex situations that may involve the potential for conflict or for harm to one or more of the parties, for example in exercise of statutory functions against the wishes of an individual or his/her carers or family. In such circumstances, the supervising professional will need to decide with the student on how to interpret appropriately the issue of consent.

The guidance set out in "Consent in Social Care" (2 July 2004) and any related updated guidance, and the principles of "Good Practice in Consent: Consent for Examination, Treatment or Care" (HSS(MD) 7/2003) should be followed by students and their supervisors. This Circular relates to social work students. A separate Circular for student health professionals has also been issued.

Service User Information

Any HPSS or voluntary sector organisation where social work teaching and learning takes place should include in its information leaflet for service users, carers and families an explanation of the importance of teaching and learning for students and an outline of what this might involve. The information leaflet, and careful explanation by students to service users, carers and families of their student status and of the supervisory safeguards in place, should assist service users in giving informed consent for contact with students. In addition, it should be made clear that service users are entitled to refuse assessment of need and subsequent care planning and service delivery by students and that such a refusal will not affect the care services they receive.

Responsibilities of Organisations and Supervising Professionals providing Practice Learning

Organisations employing social care workers are reminded of their responsibility to comply with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (NISCC) Code of Practice for Employers of Social Care Workers. Social work students must be facilitated to practise in accordance with their status as registered social care practitioners with NISCC and its Code of Practice for Social Care Workers. Organisations, which provide practice learning opportunities for students, should ensure that appropriate levels of supervision are provided for each student by appropriately trained and qualified professionals. This must be in accordance with NISCC practice learning standards, the Department's Circular on practice learning for social work and the requirements of the Degree in Social Work.

In support of this, the guidance set out in "Consent in Social Care" (2 July 2004) and the principles in "Good Practice in Consent: Consent for Examination, Treatment or Care" should also be followed by social work students and their supervisors.

Supervising Professionals should ensure that students:

- are provided with official identification demonstrating their status as social work students;
- are properly identifying themselves as social work students working under supervision on behalf of the organisation;
- are aware of the need to obtain consent for observing or undertaking social work practice including assessment of needs and/or risks for service users, carers and families; and
- do not initiate, alter or stop a care programme for any service user or carer without prior discussion and approval.

Supervising Professionals should determine how and by whom consent should be obtained. In many circumstances, it may be the students themselves who will need to seek this consent. In these circumstances, Supervising Professionals should verify, through the supervision process, that such consent has been appropriately obtained.

Responsibilities of Students

Social work students are registered on the social care worker part of the NISCC Register as a condition of enrolling as a social work student and as such must adhere to the NISCC Code of Practice for Social Care Workers.

In addition, all social work students:

- should carry their student identification at all times and introduce themselves to services users and relevant others giving both their name and status as a student;
- must maintain accurate records of all contacts with service users and relevant others in line with the organisation's requirements;
- as agreed with their Supervising Professional, will seek consent from service users and relevant others to discharge the social work service required; and
- discuss, in advance with their Supervising Professional, all aspects of obtaining consent in each situation, record the process of obtaining consent and discuss the outcomes with their Supervising Professional.



For PAUL MARTIN

cc: Dean of the Faculty of Legal, Social & Educational Sciences, QUB
Dean of the Faculty of Social Science, UU
Chief Executive of Belfast Institute for Further and Higher Education
Chief Executive of North Down and Ards Institute of Further and Higher Education
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