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Social Work Ethics Computer-Based Training Minnesota State University, Mankato Department of Social Work

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Purpose

At the Community Behavioral Health Hospital, St. Peter (CBHH), a discussion was held regarding Ethics Continuing Education Hours (CEUs). The Minnesota Board of Social Work (MNBSW) and Minnesota State Statute 148D.130 require that Licensed Social Workers receive two hours of ethics-specific CEUs per licensure renewal. Through this discussion, it appeared that it would be beneficial to create an ethics computer-based training (CBT), which would be of no expense to State Operated Services (SOS) Social Workers. This option would also provide convenience for social workers, who as a majority, reside within rural areas. The CBT created is in accordance to requirements of the MNBSW and has an emphasis to include the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics.

Research Question

How does one create an effective computer-based ethics training for social workers, residing in rural areas and working with involuntary clients of State Operated Services?

Literature Review

Ethics in the Mental Health Setting and Working with Involuntary Clients
 Social workers weigh and assess many responsibilities when working with clients who are involuntary; including one's potential for harm toward self or others, impulsivity, prevention strategies, and legal obligations. Ethical issues are also found while selecting research-based interventions for treatment, developing treatment goals and objectives, and contracting with clients (Ivanoff, Blythe, & Tripodi, 1994).

A Model for Electronic Social Work Ethics Trainings
 For the purpose of this CBT, it was important to create a resource that would not only continue practitioner's knowledge of ethical frameworks, but also provide a forum for the social worker to practice their problem-solving skills with ethical dilemmas they will encounter. McAuliffe and Ferman's (2002) curriculum seems to expand learners' knowledge by providing an overview of ethical decision-making models.

An Ethical Decision-Making Model
 Lowenberg, et al's (2005) model provides a comprehensive approach to reviewing ethical dilemmas; viewing them from a variety of perspectives. It includes the Ethical Rules Screen and Ethical Principles Screen. This model is also applicable in an array of social services settings and may be used in diverse circumstances.

Technological Techniques for Creating Computer-Based Education Environments
 One advantage for computer-assisted education is that learners are able to be self-paced and directed (Biggerstaff, 2005; Piccoli, Ahmad, & Ives, 2001; Thurston & Cauble, 1999). Several studies have shown that computer-assisted education can help individuals learn more quickly than traditional lectures (Thurston and Cauble, 1999). A study completed by Bagui (1998) suggested that learning occurs as computer-assisted education is able to provide interactivity, flexibility, rich content, motivational effects, immediate feedback, stimulating presentation of materials, and the ability to structure instructions. On the contrast, challenges to computer-assisted education are that learners may experience feelings of isolation, frustration, anxiety, and confusion. Previous experience using computer-assisted education formats was beneficial, as learners were able to fine-tune strategies appropriate for these types of environments (Piccoli, Ahmad, & Ives, 2001). Another challenge of computer-assisted education was that learners may have reduced interest in the subject matter, related to their attitudes toward this form of education (Brown, 1996; Hara and King, 2000; Maki et al, 2000; Piccoli, Ahmad & Ives, 2001).

Studies conducted by Stemler (1997) summarize that multimedia that has been proven to be educationally effective is mindful of screen design, learner control and navigation, use of feedback, learner interactivity, and audio and visual elements. Baeulaurier & Haffey (2005) also agree that audio-visual aids and auto-didactic learning devices are beneficial to creating an effective training. Hypermedia applications are one way to enhance audio-didactic learning. Hypermedia can include a combination of digitized graphics, animation, sound, video, and fonts, as well as, templates for designing tutorial screens, multiple-choice questions, drag-and-drop questions, matching questions, interactive simulations, and structures for judging short answer questions (Cohen & Portney, et al, 2006; Patterson and Yaffe, 1994).

Methodology

Development of an ethics CBT involves consideration of many different aspects. The literature demonstrates that social workers working with clients who are involuntary experience unique ethical dilemmas. The CBT provides specific vignettes and simulations related to these circumstances. Through extensive literature review, McAuliffe and Ferman's learning objectives were chosen for the CBT, as they work to expand learners' ability to utilize an ethical decision-making model, and also provide learners with additional ethics resources. Specific training modules for the CBT include a focus toward Lowenberg, et al's (2005) ethical decision-making model. CBT participants were asked to practice utilizing each screening process during various simulations. Simulations and other content of the CBT is presented while utilizing diverse hypermedia techniques.

Upon completion of the CBT, an IRB-approved satisfaction survey was provided to SOS employees participating in a pilot of the training. Outcomes of the survey were collected, and formulated into recommendations for revisions to the CBT. Once revisions to the CBT are made, SOS Staff Development will assist in placing it on SOS's Pathlore System, via their I-Net Website, so it may be accessible to all SOS social workers.

Outline of the Ethics Computer Based Training

- I. Learning Objectives
 - A. Social workers will be provided a brief overview of the historical development and nature of values and ethics in social work.
 - B. They will examine the relationship between personal values, those of the social work profession and broader culture.
 - C. Participants will investigate their awareness of personal biases that are reflected in social work interventions.
 - D. Social workers will demonstrate knowledge of the professions' code of ethics, the ethical responsibilities inherent in the code, and legal parameters around those responsibilities.
 - E. They will learn and apply a decision-making framework to ethical dilemmas encountered while working with clients who are involuntary and in a mental health setting.
 - F. Participants will be provided tools and resources they may use to enhance their knowledge of ethical issues and their ability to resolve ethical conflicts.

II. The Evolution of Social Work Ethics
 The evolution of social work ethics may be captured in four different periods: The Mortality Period, Exploration of Values, Emergence of Ethical Theory and Decision Making, and Maturation of Ethical Standards (Reamer, 1998).

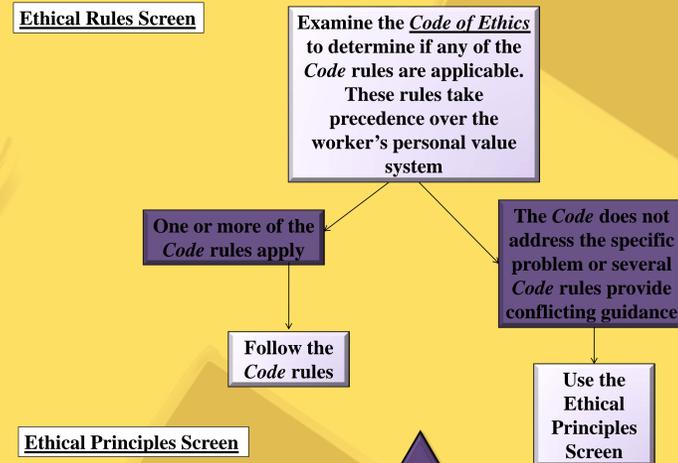
III. The NASW Code of Ethics
 IV. What is an Ethical Dilemma? <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/asp>

Ethical Dilemmas Arise When There is a Conflict In:

<u>Proposed By:</u>	Problem Definition Goal Setting Decision on Strategy	Decision on Means Priority Setting Desired Outcomes Evaluation Reporting
	Client Agency Profession	Practitioner Community Society
<u>Because Each Relates to Different Assumptions:</u>	Human Nature Issues	Values System Levels

V. Ethical Decision-Making
 Critical thinking is extremely important in social work, but critical thinking without some method may rather quickly become mere justification of one's views (Meacham, 2007). Decisions regarding ethical questions should not made by social workers in an arbitrary manner. They are grounded in the conditions and the factors related to the decision-maker, the situational circumstances, and the process itself (Mattison, 2000). Ethical decision involve not only distinguishing right from wrong, but also addressing the more troubling good/good or bad/bad variety of deliberations. The more troubling ethical decisions involve choosing among possible choices of action, each of which offers potential benefits or negative outcomes.

VI. Ethical Decisions-Making Models



Computer-Based Training Pilot Evaluation

The research question sought by this evaluation is "What level of satisfaction do CBT participants' have with the program?" Results from a satisfaction survey will feed recommendations for improvements or modifications to the CBT, prior to its placement on SOS's Pathlore System. The satisfaction survey was approved by Minnesota State University's Internal Review Board (IRB), prior to participants' assistance in this project. The CBT was piloted with three participants; a sample including two SOS social workers and a member of SOS Staff Development. This sample is considered to have a non-probability design and is also a convenience sample. The satisfaction survey is a Post-test Only Design for Single Groups, combining Likert Scales with open-ended questions. It explored domains of the CBT including content, perceived learning outcomes, format, and media.

Findings of Pilot

- All participants strongly agreed or agree on the following:
- The CBT addresses Ethics Continuing Education requirements (2-hours per licensure renewal) associated with Minnesota Board of Social Work.
- The CBT clearly defines its Learning Objectives.
- The CBT clearly defines an Ethical Dilemma.
- The CBT expanded my knowledge surrounding The Evolution of Social Work Ethics.
- The CBT provided a comprehensive review of the NASW Code of Ethics.
- The CBT expanded knowledge of how Personal, Social Work, & Cultural Values intersect.
- The CBT expanded knowledge of how Legal Parameters can impact ethical decision-making.
- The CBT offered an opportunity to practice and apply a Decision-Making Model.
- The CBT offered Ethics Resources.
- Case simulations in the CBT were reflective of practice.
- The screen designs of the CBT maintained interest.
- The format of the CBT was easy to follow.
- The CBT offers tutorials that reflect understanding of the content.

Narrative Feedback Themes

- Strengths: Historic overview, scenarios, and advanced ethics material.
- Limitations: Distracting graphics, scenario updates yearly, and information density.

Recommendations for Computer-Based Training

- Revise case scenarios on an annual basis.
- Review and revise graphics as needed.
- Due to small piloting size, continue to receive evaluations from CBT participants.
- Ethics in general are naturally dynamic, therefore the CBT must be dynamic.