Spring 2022 Editorial: Supporting Diversity and Discovering the Virtues of Virtual Practice

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In the Spring 2022 issue of *Advances in Social Work,* we are pleased to present 14 papers written by 40 authors from different regions of the U.S. The articles in this issue include a selection of empirical studies (n=6) and conceptual pieces (n=8). While the 14 articles cover a wide range of topics, two underlying themes include supporting different aspects of diversity in practice and in social work education and discovering the virtues of virtual practice. This issue begins with an important Letter to the Editor from four social work colleagues, *Jessica Aldrich Strassman, Sara Schwartz, Eugenia Weiss,* and *Ann Petrila,* who call all social work professionals to be prepared to address the re-traumatization that the war in Ukraine is having on people globally—especially those who experienced similar trauma from World War II and other major conflicts. The mental health impact of war trauma and forced migration, even intergenerationally, is something that all social workers need to be informed about.

Who's Considered a Social Worker?

As producers and consumers of social work research, it is incumbent upon each of us to be aware of who is being classified as a social worker in published studies. Drawing on studies of social workers' participation in the political process, *Meehan, Ostrander, and Lane* bring attention to the important issue of how researchers define social workers for inclusion in study samples. In order to make comparisons across studies involving social workers and to draw accurate conclusions, Meehan and colleagues call us to be informed about how each study defines and samples social workers—are social work students included, social work graduates, members of NASW, social work faculty, licensed practitioners? Are we paying attention to who is considered a social worker and how are they being compared?

Practice Innovations

After providing an overview of different historical periods in the development of social work ethics, *Reamer* draws from other health care professions in proposing a progressive approach to managing ethical challenges faced by social work practitioners: informal conversations, formal consultations, ethics committees, and ethics rounds. Reamer uses actual cases to illustrate the use of each approach to resolving ethical conflicts in social work practice situations. As Reamer concludes, it is "vitally important" that "social workers who encounter challenging ethical issues are fully aware of the deliberate steps they can take to act responsibly in an effort to protect clients, third parties, and themselves" (p. 28).

Extending the call for ethical practice, in this case on behalf of immigrants in the U.S., *Zayas* provides three case illustrations of social work advocacy in federal immigration courts. In all three types of cases, social work advocacy positively influenced the outcome of immigration cases, helping to bring about lasting positive policy changes. Zayas shares

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insider wisdom about how social workers can be effective in testifying in court, whether on behalf of immigrants or other client populations.

In a qualitative study conducted in rural Indiana, *Lopez, Galindo, Viramontez Anguiano, Corkill, Jacob-Bellowe, and Weaver* take an in-depth look at how religious leaders can fill in the gap between the needs of newcomer immigrant families and the services available in destination communities. The social capital provided by Latino churches and religious leaders as they served as cultural and language brokers was absolutely instrumental in assisting families in adapting to their new communities. Lopez and colleagues call for social workers to partner with local religious leaders to better serve Latino immigrant families as they resettle, pursue education, and seek employment.

An enduring and perhaps growing challenge in the U.S. landscape is the struggle with substance misuse. One of the populations who have been the most stigmatized by their substance misuse is pregnant women. With this in mind, *Trainor* surveyed health care professionals from a variety of disciplines, including social work, about their perceptions of patients struggling with maternal substance use disorder. Trainor's findings underscore the importance of health care providers refraining from judgmental attitudes and actions and instead engaging new and pregnant mothers in the care of their infants.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced a major transition in how social services are delivered. To learn how social service agencies managed to continue meeting client needs in the midst of the pandemic, *Hirschi, Hunter, Neely-Barnes, Malone, Meiman, and Delavega* interviewed the leaders of 37 social service agencies in the Mid-South. Despite initial challenges with the transition to telehealth services, many agencies found that virtual delivery of services had some unexpected advantages over face-to-face services. Consequentially, technology has become an integral aspect of delivering many types of social services going forward. With virtual services becoming an enduring medium for delivering support to clients, Hirschi and colleagues call for careful consideration of ethical issues and educational approaches to teaching telehealth to current and future providers.

With a similar concern about the changes in service delivery as a result of the pandemic, *Rosten, Gaitan, Shah, and Walls* chose to document the perspective of 10 front-line social workers using a multi-method approach including photo elicitation. Their analysis revealed three prominent themes: professional flexibility and creativity, connection, and recentering generalist social work skills. Going forward, Rosten and colleagues urge providers and agencies to embrace and continue the flexible approach to service delivery necessitated by the pandemic.

Innovations in Social Work Education

In a concise yet powerful paper, *Levine and Ghezzi* propose new pedagogical approaches to teaching the DSM that center diversity and equity. While the DSM-5 Task Force endeavored to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity, Levine & Ghezzi assert that the 5th edition of the DSM falls short of the goal of providing guidance to support and empower diverse clients. To overcome the shortcomings of the DSM-5, Levine & Ghezzi provide practical suggestions for promoting students' critical thinking about the cultural dimension of formulating client problems and the application of DSM diagnoses and

processes. For social work professionals, the goal must be, as eloquently stated by Levine & Ghezzi, to advance "understanding of mental health assessment and intervention that is inclusive and equitable for all" (p. 140).

In another innovation to social work teaching, **Harden and Jones** call for instructors to adopt principles of brain-based learning in schools of social work. According to Harden & Jones, brain-based learning has been around in primary and secondary educational settings for decades and is more recently emerging in higher education. In this contribution, Harden & Jones review the 12 principles of brain-based learning and illustrate how each principle can be applied in social work education to enhance not only student learning but students' overall well-being.

Schwartz and Curran offer an informative paper describing technical standards and explaining why they are increasingly important in social work education. In short, technical standards are non-academic criteria for admission to and continuation in social work degree programs. Schwartz & Curran distinguish technical standards from other non-academic standards such as "essential requirements" and point out the nature of challenges that may arise in implementing technical standards. Drawing from legal cases to illustrate the use and importance of technical standards, Schwartz & Curran urge schools of social work to adopt technical standards to help "to manage the delicate and often difficult balance between serving as student-focused educators and professional gatekeepers" (p. 173).

An ongoing challenge of schools of social work is to prepare new MSW students to enter their field practicums with at least a basic level of clinical skills. **Zweben, Piepmeier, and Leak** propose an experiential lab model to teach Motivational Interviewing (MI) skills to new MSW students. The skills-based MI lab is described in detail and touted as a successful model for enhancing students' clinical skills and preparing them to enter their field practicums ready to effectively engage clients.

In an interesting qualitative inquiry, **Sherwood, VanDeusen, Diaconu, and Jones** describe a project that integrated service-learning, disaster social work in Puerto Rico, environmental justice, critical theory, trauma, and resilience. Using critical reflection as a pedagogical tool to reveal the dynamics of power, privilege, and oppression in a post-disaster context, Sherwood and colleagues describe key lessons learned by MSW students who travelled from the Midwest to Puerto Rico to engage with grassroots community organizations and local social workers. Based on critical reflection about their experiences in the service-learning course, several students found themselves drawn to macro-level practice opportunities.

In response to the age-old challenge of engaging social work students in mastering research concepts and principles, **Wagner and Bowland** propose a flipped classroom approach that emphasizes self-paced learning and hands-on experiences in the classroom. Drawing guidance from Kolb's Active Learning Cycle, Wagner & Bowland provide practical suggestions for using flipped classroom strategies to promote interest and engagement in research among both BSW and MSW students.

While interprofessional practice education is widely touted as a critical approach to training social work students, there has been less attention to figuring out how to make

field experiences interprofessional. In this paper ***Walsh, Jaggers, Satre, and Hall*** present student feedback on a short-term interprofessional field practicum as part of a HRSA-funded training program. While the study revealed various barriers to implementing IPE-focused practicums, students were able to gain valuable exposure to interprofessional consultations on actual cases.