

NOTICE OF CENSURE of Kerri-Lynne Cornish

PURPOSE

By publishing this censure, the College endeavors to:

- Illustrate for Social Workers and members of the public, what does or does not constitute unprofessional conduct
- Provide Social Workers with direction about the College's standards of practice, ethics and professional conduct

SUMMARY

Kerri-Lynne Cornish was registered with the Manitoba College of Social Workers (the College / MCSW), in the Practicing Category, from May 21, 2015 until September 5, 2018 at which time Ms. Cornish's request to withdraw her registration was accepted by the College. Prior to her registration in Manitoba, Ms. Cornish was a Registered Social Worker in Ontario.

On January 24, 2017 the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) received a complaint regarding the professional conduct of Ms. Cornish. OCSWSSW investigated the complaint and referred the matter to their Discipline Committee. OCSWSSW's Discipline Committee's Decision, dated August 2, 2018 and available to the public on OCSWSSW's website:

[http://www.ocswssw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Neutralized Decision and Reasons Kerri-Lynne Cornish 800897.pdf](http://www.ocswssw.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Neutralized_Decision_and_Reasons_Kerri-Lynne_Cornish_800897.pdf) contained an Agreed Statement of Facts. In this Agreed Statement of Facts, Ms. Cornish admitted that she provided counselling to the former client in question and maintained a romantic relationship with the former client until June 2016, while a Member of the Manitoba College of Social Workers.

Upon review, the Complaints Committee determined the Member failed to establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries in her relationship with her former client, while a Member of MCSW. The impact of the Member's breach of professional boundaries were significant and are described in OCSWSSW's Discipline Committee's Decision.

APPLICABLE PROFESSIONAL OBLIGATIONS

The Complaints Committee considered the following sections of MCSW's Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, and, in view of the available information, concluded the former Member failed to adhere to the following:

Code of Ethics

Guideline 2 – Ethical Responsibilities in Professional Relationships

2.6.2 Social Workers who have provided psychotherapy or in-depth counselling do not engage in romantic relationships, sexual activities or sexual contact with former clients. It is the responsibility of the Social Worker to evaluate the nature of the professional relationship they had with a client and to determine whether the Social Worker is in a position of power and/or authority that may unduly and/or negatively affect the decisions and actions of their former client.

MCSW Standards of Practice

Standard 3 – Integrity of Professional Practice

Social Workers will conduct professional practice with the understanding that there are limits and boundaries to the scope of their intervention and relationships with clients.

The influence of the professional relationship between Social Worker and client is pervasive and may endure long after the professional relationship has terminated. Social Workers are to be aware of the potential for conflict of interest, and harmful treatment that exploits clients within the professional relationship.

Practice Directives

3.1 Social Workers will declare and avoid conflicts of interest in forming relationships with clients or former clients, clients' family members, with students, employees and persons being supervised, that might present the risk of compromising the member's professional judgment or of increasing the risk of exploitation or harm to clients.

3.7 If a personal or intimate relationship develops between a Social Worker and a former client, it is the Social Worker, and not the client, who assumes full responsibility for demonstrating that the former client has not been directly or indirectly exploited, coerced or manipulated into forming or maintaining the relationship.

DECISION

The College is the regulatory body for Social Workers in Manitoba. Self-regulation is a privilege granted through legislation and each Member has a responsibility to adhere to recognized and approved standards of practice and ethical guidelines established by the profession.

The Complaints Committee formally records its disapproval of the lack of professionalism exhibited by the former Member in failing to adhere to MCSW's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Social Workers must conduct their professional practice with integrity. The failure to maintain professional boundaries is contrary to the high standard of trust which the public expects of Social Workers. Therefore, the former Member's actions were harmful to the public interest and the interest of the profession as a whole.

The Member was censured by the Complaints Committee on January 9, 2020, in accordance with paragraph 31(1)(d) and Subsection 33(1) of the *Social Work Profession Act* (the SWPA). Pursuant to that paragraph of the SWPA, the former Member agreed to accept the censure and the Complaints Committee determined that no other action is to be taken against the former Member in respect of these matters. The Complaints Committee further determined that the interest in educating the public and deterring similar activity in the future weighed in favour of publishing this censure, pursuant to 33(2) of the SWPA.

Pursuant to Subsection 33(3) the Complaints Committee endeavors to minimize costs to the membership by entering an agreed upon payment to recover costs from the censured Member/former Member. As such, the former Member has agreed to pay \$1000 of the costs of the investigation into this matter.