CalSWEC II Mental Health Initiative
Mental Health Competencies
Advanced/Specialization Year
March 2005

A Competency-Based Curriculum in Community Mental Health
For Graduate Social Work Students

Introduction

This document builds upon the Mental Health Competencies originally developed in a collaborative effort of faculty from Schools of Social Work and professionals from County Mental Health Agencies throughout California in 1993. During 2003, a new collaborative partnership between Mental Health and Social Work Education was formed, and through this effort, the document has been revised to accurately reflect the state of public mental health practice today. This document includes revisions recommended by the CalSWEC Mental Health Initiative Committee and a variety of community based stakeholder organizations and participants.

The format of the Mental Health competencies divides them into Foundation and Advanced categories, which correspond roughly to the first and second years of the MSW program. The Competencies are based on a series of principle statements adapted from the Mental Health Services Act (December 2004) and the California Mental Health Master Plan: A Vision for California (March 2003).

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California Community Mental Health Curriculum Principles

The CalSWEC Mental Health Competencies are designed to prepare an MSW level workforce to effectively provide mental health services to children, adults and older adults, and to contribute to a Mental Health system which:

1. Promotes recovery/wellness through independence, hope, personal development and resiliency for adults and older adults with severe mental illness and for children with serious emotional disorders and their families.

2. Provides culturally and linguistically competent services that are sensitive and responsive to the needs of the local community, and addresses issues of ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and religious/spiritual beliefs.

3. Strives to involve clients and families appropriately in all aspects of the public mental health system, including but not limited to: planning, policy development, service delivery and evaluation.

4. Strives to create a partnership of cooperation and a shared vision of mental health services with other agency partners in the social service arena.

5. Is an advocate for clients’ rights.

6. Promotes the development and use of self-help, peer support and peer education for all persons with mental illness and their families.

7. Assists clients in their recovery to return to the most constructive and satisfying lifestyle of their own definition and choice.

8. Provides persons with severe mental illness and/or serious emotional disturbances effective treatment and high priority for receiving services in the most timely manner.

9. Provides services in the least restrictive and most appropriate setting.

10. Supports a Children's System of Care consisting of family-driven, culturally competent, individualized, coordinated and integrated care with accountability to positive outcomes, which meet the unique needs of children and their families.

11. Supports an Adult System of Care consisting of client driven, culturally competent, coordinated, integrated and effective service meeting the unique needs of adults and older adults with severe mental illness, their families and their extended social support system.

12. Addresses the special mental health needs of all persons with severe mental illness and/or serious emotional disorders who also present with co-occurring substance abuse, psychiatric disabilities and/or other multiple vulnerabilities.
I. Culturally and Linguistically Competent Mental Health Practice

This section builds upon the multicultural knowledge, values and skills that were delivered in the foundation year. Culturally competent practice supports the understanding that culture is an integral process in all individuals' lives, and impacts not only their ability to adapt to life events, stresses, successes and failures, but also their willingness and ability to undergo treatment for mental health disorders of all types. Linguistically competent practice is not only the importance of language but includes the dynamic complexities of effective communication in order to provide culturally competent services.

In the Advanced curriculum, students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the major ethnic and cultural groups represented in California. Students should be able to recognize, understand, and appreciate their own culture as well as the culture of others. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to consistently apply an understanding of the impact of social and political categories of race, ethnicity, age, gender, class, ability, mental illness, sexual/affectional orientation, religion, education, profession, residence, marital status, etc. at the personal, interpersonal, institutional and community levels of interaction as they complete assessment, treatment interventions, and termination activities with clients of the mental health system. Advanced mental health practice entails an attention to culturally guided community based interventions as well as a commitment to social justice.

Advanced Competencies

1. Student can apply knowledge and appreciation of their own culture and the cultural differences of others, being able to identify the strengths of diverse populations. Student is able to identify how their culture may impact positively or negatively on provision of services.

2. Student demonstrates knowledge of diversity within ethnic and cultural groups in terms of social class, assimilation, acculturation and their particular ways of being.

3. Student is able to develop treatment goals and interventions that are congruent with cultural perspectives across diverse groups.

4. Student can critically evaluate how to use or set aside his/her own cultural values and norms in transcultural social work mental health practice and demonstrates skill in understanding and using her/his own identity and sense of self in same culture as well as cross-cultural interpersonal encounters.

5. Student demonstrates flexibility and uses an array of culturally sensitive and relevant clinical skills in the teaching, advocate, treatment, healing and case-management roles.
6. Student is knowledgeable about the common elements of practice (e.g. making eye contact, initiating a handshake, etc.) and how they may clash with the cultural values of various ethnic and cultural groups.

7. Student demonstrates knowledge about: a) specific cultural features that may be present in various disorders, b) culture-bound syndromes, c) cultural explanations of illness, d) help seeking behaviors in diverse populations, and e) appreciation for traditional ethnic and cultural healing practices.

8. Student demonstrates knowledge and ability to work with interpreters in on-going treatment and in long term treatment relationships.

9. Student can apply awareness of the effects of acute and accumulative trauma on the health status; health beliefs; help-seeking behaviors; and health practices, customs and traditions of diverse clients and communities.

10. Student can work through differences sensitively in community mental health practice relationships with clients, their families, colleagues, other professionals and the community.

11. Student is able to critically evaluate the relevance of intervention models to be applied with diverse ethnic and cultural populations, and other special needs groups.

12. Student can apply knowledge of immigration, migration, resettlement and relocation patterns of the major ethnic groups in the US in the context of both historical and current manifestations of oppression, racism, prejudice, discrimination, bias and privilege.

13. Student works to remove institutional barriers that prevent ethnic and cultural groups from using mental health services, and can identify appropriate macro level interventions.

14. Student is knowledgeable about the potential bias present in clinical assessment instruments and critically interprets findings within the appropriate cultural, linguistic and life experience context of the client.

15. Student engages in efforts to systematically collect and organize observations knowledge and experience that will advocate for improved policies and delivery of services in the community.
II. Advanced Mental Health Practice

Practice competencies expected in the advanced year addresses the complexity and scope of mental health treatment, including specialized services with distinct sub-groups of individuals with severe emotional illness and their families. The competencies in this section include skills necessary to implement a variety of integrated models of intervention such as: advocacy, case management, psychosocial rehabilitation, team consultation regarding medication, evidence-based practice, time limited treatment and nontraditional healing practices. These competencies are to be demonstrated in accordance with legal and ethical standards, principles of cultural diversity, commitment to social and economic justice and with sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable populations.

Practice with Individuals

1. Student applies more advanced and complex analyses of human development and the life cycle towards understanding the reciprocal interactions of bio-psycho-social factors.

2. Student is able to understand the relationship between theories and treatment in formulating a comprehensive assessment linked to goals.

3. Student demonstrates knowledge of the mental status examination as part of an assessment to support diagnosing children, adolescents and adults.

4. Student is able to diagnose the major mental health disorders using the DSM-IV-TR or other currently accepted diagnostic tools. Student is able to identify the challenges and limitations of diagnosing as applied to human behavior in working with diverse racial and cultural groups as well as lifestyles.

5. Student is aware of the prevalence of co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, understands the impact of substance abuse on major mental health disorders, and is able to include this knowledge in assessment and treatment planning with clients.

6. Student can apply and demonstrate awareness of the effects of acute, chronic and complex trauma upon the health status and help seeking abilities of individuals.

7. Student demonstrates within the scope of practice an understanding of issues related to medication information, use of non-pharmacological interventions, use of psychiatric consultation and use of medication in ethnic-specific populations.

8. Student understands research methodology as it relates to synthesizing, applying and evaluating evidence-based and promising practices. Student is able to assist clients and their families in applying evidence-based practices that support positive outcomes.
9. Student demonstrates knowledge and appropriate utilization of the various models of treatment intervention with individuals.

10. Student understands the limitations of evidence-based practices as they relate to the general population and specific racial and ethnic groups.

11. Student understands the tasks of the supervisor in relation to clinical, administrative, educational and supportive functions in public mental health agencies.

12. Student has developed knowledge of supervisory skills in conflict resolution for the purpose of enhancing multidisciplinary collaborative relationships to maximize service delivery.

Practice with Families

1. Student applies the integration of family systems theories to the treatment needs of diverse clients and their families.

2. Student can apply the principles and techniques of crisis and time limited treatment to high-risk families.

3. Student is knowledgeable of core psychosocial rehabilitation competencies that provide the basis for recovery-oriented practice.

4. Student is knowledgeable about the recovery process, and is aware of self-help and other peer support resources and other programs that support recovery that are available in the community for clients and family.

5. Student is able to assess family strengths and limitations in order to more effectively involve collaborative resources (i.e. schools, housing, rehabilitative services).

6. Student has the skills to intervene in a family system where a member has a co-occurring substance abuse and major mental illness, to promote stability and relapse prevention.

7. Student is able to identify and respond to the mental health needs of children in out-of-home placement and their families.

8. Student demonstrates knowledge and appropriate utilization of various models of treatment intervention with families.
Practice with Groups

1. Student will understand how to communicate effectively with ethnic sensitive practice.

2. Student will understand a client’s barriers to effective problem solving and emphasize client empowerment via group process.

3. Student is aware and can understand how the ‘use of self’ impacts on group process.

4. Student can appropriately develop and maintain group structure.

5. Student has knowledge of ethical standards that apply to group work.

6. Student will understand evidence-based practice of positive outcomes as related to the client’s compliance and accountability in group process.

Practice with Community

1. Student utilizes principles of integrated services, continuity of care, case coordination, collaboration and effective discharge from services in work with clients and families.

2. Student is aware of integrated case management which includes the following: supported education, supportive housing and supported employment programs, alternatives to hospital and other institutional 24-hour care settings, and maximizes the utilization of natural community support.

3. Student demonstrates the ability to utilize differing outreach and advocacy strategies for the benefit of clients and their families.

4. Student demonstrates knowledge of specific strategies that empower clients and their families and support self-determination.

5. Student demonstrates knowledge of the various funding streams associated with public health and human services at the local, state and national levels and how these funding streams relate to public mental health services.

6. Student demonstrates skill in the use of outcome measures in developing and evaluating programs.

7. Student is able to apply the concepts of crisis intervention, intensive case management to community disasters.
III. Human Behavior and the Mental Health Environment

Competencies in this section allow students to build on basic knowledge and understanding of human behavior and development, and begin to apply these theories to specialized circumstances and sub-groups within the mental health client community. Knowledge of effects of homelessness, substance abuse and other co-occurring disorders, poverty upon individuals, as well as an ability to utilize community and family resource support systems as interventions are included.

Advanced Competencies

1. Student demonstrates an understanding of the unique mental health needs of special populations, including for example, people who are homeless, children, older adults, gay and lesbian, women, or incarcerated, and people having HIV+/AIDS, physical disabilities and co-occurring disorders.

2. Student understands the discovery and utilization of individual, family and community strengths in the assessment, service planning and service delivery phases, and the importance of addressing multiple domains of functioning in each of these phases.

3. Student understands issues of the contributing and interacting factors of biology, personal attributes, coping style, trauma and other developmental events and how these may impact and interact with mental illness or severe emotional disturbances.

4. Student demonstrates an awareness and understanding of the role of both natural community supports and resources, and community programs that may be effective (i.e. community-based support systems).

5. Student understands the client in the context of their family and is able to help identify the role of family in the recovery process. The student understands the support needs of both the client and their family.

6. Student demonstrates skills in the use of clinical outcome measures in developing and evaluating programs in a cross cultural milieu.

7. Student is knowledgeable about public misperceptions around people with mental illness that are prevalent in the U.S., understands how they impact stigma and discrimination, and how this misperception affects help seeking behaviors. Student is knowledgeable about research studies that have investigated these commonly held misperceptions.
IV. Mental Health Policy and Planning

The competencies in this area build on foundation knowledge of agency environments and practices with a broader focus on policy development, program planning, evaluation and service delivery aspects of mental health services. Skills in administration and leadership are also addressed, as well as other strategies to enhance organizational effectiveness. Critical to the development of the student in these competency areas is an understanding of the role of the practitioner, the agency and the community (with emphasis on clients and families), in shaping policy, influencing legislation and participating in the development and implementation of mental health service programs.

Advanced Competencies

Policy

1. Student demonstrates an understanding of how political ideologies and social values influence the development of legislation, policies, program services and funding at all system levels.

2. Student demonstrates an understanding of current mental health policy and legislation and the implications of these for diverse and disenfranchised populations and communities.

3. Student demonstrates knowledge of the stakeholder community.

Program Planning and Evaluation

4. Student demonstrates an understanding of the role of clients and families in how community mental health programs are designed and implemented.

5. Student demonstrates an understanding of how community mental health programs are designed and evaluated and the relationship between the two.

6. Student demonstrates an understanding of the methods of scientific research and can apply this knowledge to critically assess mental health services data in support of the delivery of evidence-based practice.

Service Delivery

7. Student demonstrates knowledge of the range and effectiveness of community supports needed to sustain a “life in the community.”

8. Student demonstrates knowledge of state and federal laws that impact community mental health services and protect the individuals and communities they serve.
9. Student demonstrates an understanding of legal and ethical issues affecting the treatment and habilitation of persons with mental illness.

**Administration/Leadership**

10. Student demonstrates an understanding of the various organizational structures of behavioral health systems at the local, state, national and international levels, and how these impede or enhance quality care.

11. Student demonstrates knowledge about organizational change theories and how they impact mental health systems.

12. Student demonstrates an understanding of the functions of administrative practice regarding planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting, and evaluation.

13. Student demonstrates understanding of the administrative and systemic issues of providing direct services to people with mental illness in a client/family-driven, creative, flexible and culturally competent manner.

14. Student demonstrates an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a leader/manager to plan and develop systems that maximize the abilities and talents of diverse staff and client populations.