
Guest Editorial

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Re-imagining registration – dream a new dream!

I wish to thank the editors for their invitation to offer this editorial on the topic of the review of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003. The challenge that I intend to outline concerns 're-imagining' our profession in terms of the way in which it 'regulates who is a professional social worker'. In short, I am inviting 'you' the readers, to 'dream a new dream' that we can work toward making a lived reality in our profession. My reason for wanting to share a dream with you is that during the development stages of the Social Workers Registration Act, there was little time and space to step out of the proverbial box and imagine alternatives based on ideals of the profession. The dream reported below is an attempt to imagine another way at this time when the Act is being reviewed and to encourage 'us' to strive towards an improved registration system.

In my dream the Social Workers Registration Act has been amended to recognise and honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi to the extent that Te Tiriti informs the governance structure and regulatory processes. The membership of the new social work regulatory body consists of a mix of representatives appointed by the Crown, some elected by social workers and others mandated by iwi. This civic partnership between state, profession and iwi also supports the self-determination of iwi in relation to Maori interests and Maori social work practice. What this means is that the regulatory authority's constitution and decision-making processes are Treaty-based.

Another feature of the dream was a more inclusive social work profession and regulatory authority that engaged with the breadth and depth of social practice and established clear pathways and agreements with colleagues who identify and associate as youth workers, family/whanau support workers, kaimahi, kaiawhina and community workers. It also celebrated people's strengths and contributions to social practice and looked to open doors rather than narrow or close them. In a similar vein, the processes of registering and regulating who can work with the people we call clients were mana-enhancing with assurance processes such as supervision, employment, performance management, professional membership, continuing professional education and the completion of courses of study being recognised as ensuring competence and fitness. In other words, in the regulatory context, competence and fitness were presumed, unless reasons were identified to question it, and when such reasons were raised, then formal processes were to be used.

The final scene within the dream concerns direct government funding of the operating expenditure of the regulatory system, which is in contrast to the current money circle whereby the Government funds providers who then pay the regulatory authority, and transaction costs thereby accrue for each payment. In the direct bulk-funded environment of the dream any additional fees charged to cover short falls or inadequacies in government funding were minimal, manageable and tax deductible.

In conclusion, the alternative described above is in stark contrast to the current system, which is:

- not Te Tiriti o Waitangi based (the Treaty is not mentioned in the Act);
- costly and overly bureaucratic;
- assumes that all social workers aren't competent until this is proven by way of an assessment; and
- has not been mana-enhancing for some people who have applied.

As a professional community that aspires to walk our talk concerning social justice and strengths-based, mana-enhancing practice, it is time not only to re-imagine registration but also to completely redesign it. Strengths-based mana-enhancing registration anyone????
