

Introduction to the Curriculum



The social work profession has recognized, for many years, the significance of alcohol use problems in the lives of the individuals, families, and communities that we serve. In fact, the *Social Work Speaks* statement (1997) acknowledges that alcohol is involved in numerous deaths, health related problems, employment and economic disruptions, child maltreatment, domestic violence, date rape, crimes, problems of prenatal development, and as a co-morbid feature of many psychiatric disorders. Social workers know that problems are not experienced solely by the individuals who use and abuse alcohol; the social work profession embraces a family systems perspective that addresses the recursive effects of alcohol problems on the family and of family history on alcohol consumption.

In light of these concerns, the *Social Work Speaks* statement enumerates the responsibilities of social workers vis-à-vis this area. First, social workers need to recognize alcohol disorders as “primary” problems, not solely as symptoms of other problems. Second, all social workers have a responsibility to develop knowledge and skills for the identification, assessment, treatment, and referral of clients with alcohol use problems. In addition, it is acknowledged that social workers need to rely on accurate, scientific knowledge concerning the complex causal factors and on empirically based interventions for alcohol use disorders. Preparing for this type of responsible, professional practice begins with the social work education experience.

Developing and providing alcohol-related materials to social work educators is not a new strategy for personnel preparation. For example, in 1989, NASW and the Office for

NIAAA: Social Work Education for the Prevention and Treatment of Alcohol Use Disorders Substance Abuse Prevention jointly sponsored the production of a bibliography and resource guide on alcohol and other drugs for social work educators. Subsequently, between 1991-1994, a set of alcohol-related curriculum materials was developed under the collaborative auspices of NASW, CSWE, National Association of Deans and Directors of Graduate Programs in Social work and the National Association of Directors of Baccalaureate Programs in Social Work (contract ADM 281-91-004). A number of proficient leaders in social work research and education were involved in their development, dissemination, and evaluation. In 1995 the product, Curriculum Modules on Alcohol and Other Drug Problems for Schools of Social Work, was printed.

In the intervening years, numerous changes in the profession of social work and in the empirical base of alcohol disorders prevention and treatment have occurred. One of the important changes is that NASW has developed specialty certification on alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD). ATOD social work faculty development efforts have been generated by NIAAA, NIDA, and CSAP. The goals of these efforts have been (1) to develop a cadre of faculty to provide leadership for the integration of ATOD content into clinical training and (2) assessment of curricular needs, and (3) to implement ATOD curricula in academic programs. In addition to the obvious outcome of increasing ATOD content in social work curricula, these efforts have resulted in the emergence of a critical mass of faculty fellows in ATOD and in launching the *Journal of Social Work Practice in the Addictions*. The NASW Advanced Specialty Certification in ATOD sets standards for MSW professionals. The eligibility criteria include current NASW membership, an active NASW SCSW/DCSW or state license, MSW degree and 2 years of post-MSW ATOD social work practice experience, 180 contact hours of ATOD across 11 specific knowledge domains (in 3 clusters) and 10 skills domains, 100 hours of supervision, and letters of reference.

In response to these trends and the ongoing need for current, empirically based social work education resources, NIAAA has initiated the development of these curricular materials. The top priority in determining what to include was an emphasis on evidence-based materials. A second major priority was “user friendliness.” Hence, the materials are presented as both text-based resources for social work educators and as Powerpoint® lectures. Social work programs may use the materials in a number of ways. In some cases, the curricular materials will prove useful in launching specialized courses related to the prevention and treatment of alcohol use disorders. In other situations, it will be preferable to use portions of the curriculum (i.e., individual modules) in other non-alcohol specific courses (e.g., practice, policy, research, human behavior, diversity, social services).

NIAAA has every intention of enhancing access to these materials by social work educators. A number of initiatives have been implemented to train educators in their use; other initiatives are yet to follow. Social work educators should feel free to use the materials in the ways that best support their efforts at preparing social work professionals for practice with individuals who experience alcohol use problems—whether in specialized alcohol treatment settings or in the course of practice elsewhere.