Providing Support to Social Work Interns in Palliative and End-of-Life Care: A Pedagogical Approach

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Why This Topic?

- Field Education – “Signature Pedagogy”
- PELC – field of practice that challenges students both intellectually and emotionally – an “experience-near” process
- Critical shortage of social workers in PELC – need to educate, develop and nurture social work students who choose this field
Zelda MSW Fellowship

- Second year MSW Students
- Specialized PELC Field Placements
- Monthly seminar with Director
- Strong relationship between the Field Instructor and the Faculty Advisor
- All working together in service of the students’ learning
Creating a Safe Space – Zelda Seminar

- Relational Pedagogy
- Narrative Medicine
- Cultivating Mortality Awareness
Relational Pedagogy

- Shift away from the idea of teaching as the imparting of knowledge from one person who knows more to another who knows less.

- Teacher’s role: To structure and facilitate creative and meaningful ways for everyone – including the teacher – to learn from one another.
Narrative Medicine

- Listen, absorb, honor the meaning of and be moved by patients’ stories of illness
- Close reading (short stories, poems, memoirs)
- Reflective Writing
  - Writing at home and sharing in the seminar
  - Writing in the seminar (free-flowing / in response to a prompt)
We are mortal

Our loved ones are mortal

Cultivating this awareness breaks down the barriers between us and our patients

Move to a relationship of I and Thou (Buber)

Find ways to manage the emotions the work will engender once those barriers are down
SAFE SPACE

Cultivating Mortality Awareness

Relational Learning

Narrative Medicine

Self Reflection
Seminar Themes

- Facing mortality
- Managing intrusive thoughts
- Therapeutic use of self, transference/counter-transference, self-disclosure, intimacy
- Ethical and clinical challenges, particularly working with difficult patients/families
- Interdisciplinary collaboration/conflict; ethical dilemmas in dealing with the organization
- Access to care (e.g., poverty, race and ethnicity)
- Culture and working with difference
- Compassion fatigue and self-care


Field Instruction in the End of Life Setting: Challenges and Rewards

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Getting started- areas to consider

- Orientation/Preparation
- Models of Field Instruction
- Agency attitudes towards students - Field instructor can model enthusiasm and confidence
- "Shadowing" – How much is too much
- Need to encourage gradual autonomy and provide support in dealing with anxiety
- Assignments
Field Instruction - what is most important

- Consistency of supervisory time
- Availability/Accessibility of the field instructor (or task supervisor)
- Flexibility
- Need both regularly scheduled supervision time and “on the fly” assistance
- Meeting the student “where he/she is”
- Establishing a sense of safety
- Anticipating emotionally difficult experiences and providing opportunity to discuss.
“Approaching the supervisor-student relationship as a sacred space,...and focusing on the process of the relationship rather than the goal opens the process of fieldwork supervision to the upper limits of its potential....Sacred space means honoring the place, the hour, the importance of the relationship. (Okundaye et al, 1999)
Challenges for the Field Instructor

- Too much work and stress!
- Expectations /role
- Differences in theoretical approaches, styles
- Difficulty finding balance between “teaching” and “treating” - (maintaining boundaries while developing a supportive relationship)
- Accountability/sense of responsibility
Integration of Theory Into Practice

- Important to allow for range of theoretical approaches
- Can introduce theoretical approaches that are relevant to end of life care
- i.e. Ego Psychology/Psychodynamic approach
  - Solution Focused Therapy
  - Narrative approach
  - Strengths Perspective
Challenges for the Student

- Dealing with the emotional intensity of the work
- Countertransference
- Need for self-care
- Difficulty maintaining boundaries
- Dealing with death
Tools to facilitate learning

❖ Process recordings

➢ “Process recordings give a formal structure for student to recall, conceptualize and comment on their practice, as well as a structure for instructional feedback” (Fortune et al., 2001)

❖ Use of a narrative recording
Dealing with Serious Illness and Death

Need to remember:

“The rest of the world is not used to the visualization of death and dying” (Jennifer Phippen)
Past Challenges

- International student newly arrived to U.S. with language issues
- Difficulty dealing with a personal loss which impacted upon the student’s performance in the placement
- Avoidant behavior /lack of engagement with the placement
- Difficulty integrating into the agency and understanding agency norms and culture
Rewards

- Potential for a unique and rewarding instructor/intern relationship
- Rewards of witnessing an intern’s growth and learning and the excitement that only an intern can bring
- Holding US to the highest standards of practice
- Help with workload
- Contributing to the growth of this exciting profession

Advising Social Work Interns in PELC: A Pedagogical Approach

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Advising Social Work Interns in PELC: A Pedagogical Approach

Objective: to consider ways in which the placement experience, including disruptions, can be used as “teaching moments” in the professional development of MSW interns in PELC settings.
Internships in PELC settings, *the learning opportunities (benefits)* they afford MSW interns:

- Manage and tolerate emotionally charged material and still being effective with clients.
- Effective communication with patient, family and the interprofessional team.
- Practice Self-Care.
The **key components** to advisement include:

- Teaching Beyond the classroom
- Troubleshoot the issues
- Facilitate self-reflection and self-awareness
- Apply adult learning principles
- Integrate cognitive knowledge into demonstrated skills such as those evident in critical thinking
Examples of *field challenges* in PELC settings:

- “High profile” performance
- Disjunction of learning and teaching styles
- Avoidance
- Failure to take responsibility
- Disillusionment
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Meeting the Challenge:

- Assessment
- Consultation
- Communication
- Intervention
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**Advisement approaches:**
- Assist SWI feel capable and confident in their PELC internship
- Identify ways to sustain the SWI in field
- Integrate cognitive knowledge into demonstrated skills (i.e. Critical Thinking)
- Be physically available, emotionally accessible and approachable
Conclusion

❖ Best Practices in PELC Advisement incorporates advisory, instructional and evaluative processes for transformational learning to occur.

❖ The mission of the MSW Zelda Fellowship is to educate, mentor and develop the next generation of leaders in PELC.
References

CSWE 2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.  
http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=13780

