Book Review

Wolfer, T.A., Franklin, L.D., & Gray, K. A. (2013). *Decision cases for advanced social work practice.* New York: Columbia University Press.

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Terry A. Wolfer is professor at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, S.C., where he teaches social work practice and evaluation methodology courses in the College of Social Work. He is a recipient of the Distinguished Recent Contributions in Social Work Education Award from the Council on Social Work Education. He is the co-author of six collections of decision cases. The decision cases, which he writes based on in-depth interviews with social workers regarding real cases in practice, promote critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills in social work students.

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Decision Cases for Advanced Social Work Practice is a collection of decision cases designed to promote discussion and critical thinking among social work students and new social work graduates. The book begins with brief notes to instructors and students. For instructors, the author offers a website with teaching notes that are designed to help in selecting cases for class use and leading class discussions. For students, the authors offer some explanation on the purpose and design of the cases. The authors then provide an "Introduction to the Cases" through which they differentiate decision cases from other types of cases used for educational purposes, describe the learning outcomes that can be expected from the use of the cases with social work students, and provide a helpful chart that allows the reader to cross-reference each case with a particular setting, client system, population at risk, ethical issue, and technical knowledge.

Each chapter in the book is composed of a decision case, which begins with some background information about the agency and an introduction to the social worker. The cases then move into a presentation of a particular client system and situation the social worker is facing. For example, the case in Chapter 1 examines a social worker in an inpatient mental health setting who works with both individual and family systems as she attempts to address the needs of an elder female patient who is a racial minority affected by both poverty and mental health issues. Through her work, the social worker must take into consideration multiple ethical issues, such as client competence, the client's right to self-determination and autonomy, informed consent, confidentiality, and quality of

life as she attempts to apply various technical knowledge regarding discharge planning and legal issues in her effort to reach a resolution regarding what is in the best interest of the client.

Subsequent chapters involve social workers in case settings such as schools, an outpatient medical clinic, a university campus, an international adoption agency, child protective services, and a hospice, working with client systems from individuals and families to groups; supervisees and colleagues; and organizations that represent at-risk populations like children, elders, women, people with mental, physical, and developmental disabilities, veterans, and trauma survivors. Social workers in each case demonstrate technical knowledge specific to their practice settings as they face a wide array of ethical dilemmas covering issues such as duty to warn and/or protect, self-determination, confidentiality, professional collegiality and competence, and colleague impairment.

As both an instructor and a clinical supervisor, I concur with the authors that these cases can promote reflection and discussion that will help social workers who are new to the profession develop professional skills and judgment. A particular strength of this book is that the decision cases, based on field research with professional social workers, most of who were at the beginning of their careers, are realistic and confront a wide variety of issues and challenges social workers often address in the field. The cases are not only longer and more complex than the traditional "vignettes" commonly found in social work textbooks, but also do not provide an answer regarding how the social worker should respond. Conversely, the cases leave the reader with the challenge of deciding how to best proceed in a challenging, and sometimes controversial, situation, therefore prompting deep discussion of challenging issues and potential resolutions.

While the authors specify the cases are written in the context of advanced practice settings and targeted towards graduate students or recent graduates of a master's program, many of the practice settings, client systems, and ethical issues covered in the cases are likely to be encountered by undergraduate students and bachelor level social workers as well, specifically in rural areas where master's degrees may not be required of social workers in settings such as schools and hospices. Therefore, I believe these cases can be utilized with undergraduate students and recent graduates of bachelor's social work programs as well.

As designed, this book should have a positive impact on students' and beginning social workers' decision-making skills as they exercise their professional judgment in reaching a case decision. Overall, the cases require students to apply the social work knowledge they have accumulated throughout their social work coursework, analyze various possibilities regarding the "next steps" they should take as a social worker, and evaluate the possible outcome of their choices. Because the cases are open-ended and not tied to any specific theories or intervention approaches, students and instructors have the flexibility of drawing from a variety of theories or interventions. As a result, instructors may choose to assign readings related to a specific practice or theory to supplement the decision case.