



ACTION BRIEF

ADVANCED PRACTICE DOCTORATES IN SOCIAL WORK: Implications for Social Work Practice, Research, and Education

September, 2013

> OVERVIEW

To understand the implications of the launching of several advanced practice doctoral programs in social work, with planning for several more underway, a think tank - *Advanced Practice Doctorates: What Do They Mean for Social Work Practice, Research and Education* – was convened on September 23-24, 2013 in Washington, DC.

This first trans-social work dialogue included an interdisciplinary group of think tank participants who considered the following:

- > How can advanced practice doctorates contribute to knowledge building and the bridging of research/practice gaps?
- > What are the lessons that can be learned from the implementation of advanced practice doctoral programs in Psychology, Nursing and Occupational Therapy?
- > What are the similarities and differences among the advanced practice doctoral programs at

University of Pennsylvania, University of Tennessee and Rutgers University?

- > How will social workers with advanced practice doctoral degrees be valued in practice settings and in universities?

It was co-hosted by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the National Association of Deans and Directors of Schools of Social Work (NADD), the Association for Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors (BPD), the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education (GADE), the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR), the St. Louis Group for Excellence in Social Work and Research (SLG), and the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB). Convened under the auspices of the NASW Social Work Policy Institute (SWPI), it was also supported by Boston College, Case Western Reserve University, New York University, Ohio State University, Rutgers University, University of Denver,

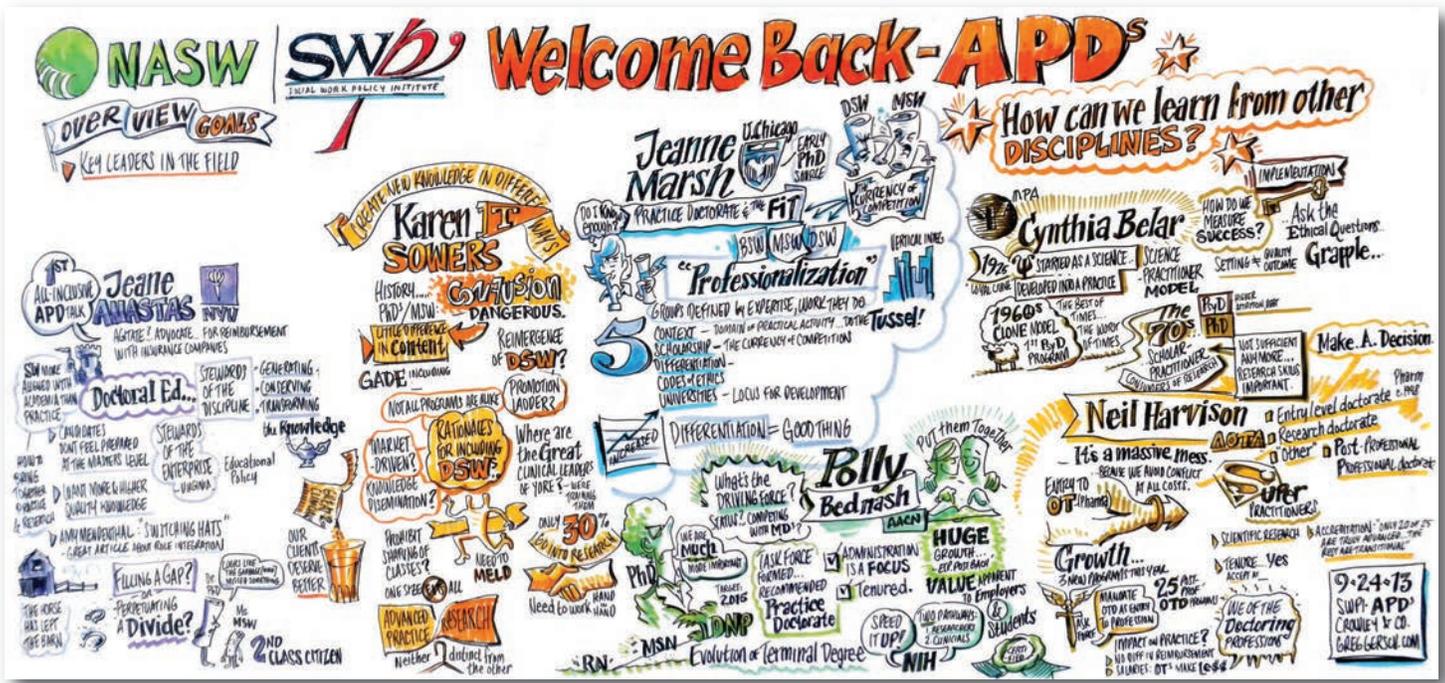
University of Michigan, University of Southern California and University of Tennessee.

This Issue Brief is a summary of the findings from the think tank. To view the Full Report and Graphic Recording please visit www.socialworkpolicy.org. As a result of the presentations and deliberations, there were several areas where there was consensus. A number of issues were identified as conundrums, requiring more information.

> CONSENSUS

- > Advanced practice doctorates in social work are continuing to emerge and demand is represented by the number of students ready and willing to invest in acquiring such degrees. Such programs can provide an opportunity to keep MSWs who seek advanced practice degrees in social work, rather than their pursuit of a doctorate degree in another practice discipline, e.g., PsyD.

- lead clinicians, supervisors, and mentors.
 - » Enhanced MSW and BSW education, as advanced practitioners join the academic workforce.
 - » As agencies provide less supervision and professional development, practitioners must seek this on their own and pursuing a DSW is one avenue to do so.
 - > Advanced practice doctorates in social work can be vehicles for producing practice-relevant knowledge and for disseminating research to practice. A capstone project that integrates theory, research and practice should be required for DSW completion.
 - > There should be a balance between program innovation and creation of guidelines, with — a tiered process starting with minimal guidelines; and perhaps at a future point, accreditation standards might be considered.
 - > The MSW degree, for now, and perhaps well into the future, will be considered a terminal degree in social work. The DSWs that will emerge over the next few years are a miniscule number of social work graduates each year.
 - > The value of an advanced practice doctorate in social work.
 - » Increased status at the interdisciplinary/interprofessional table.
 - » Enhanced BSW and MSW practice by having DSWs as
- lead clinicians, supervisors, and mentors.
 - » Enhanced MSW and BSW education, as advanced practitioners join the academic workforce.
 - » As agencies provide less supervision and professional development, practitioners must seek this on their own and pursuing a DSW is one avenue to do so.
- ## > CONUNDRUMS
- > How will DSWs and PhDs collaborate to shrink the research-practice divide?
 - » How will DSWs use research knowledge and develop new knowledge?
 - » Is the DSW a way to achieve the “practitioner-scholar” in social work?
 - > Is there an organizational home for DSW education – should it be GADE? Should it be CSWE?
 - > How will DSW education be financed? Will persons pursuing a DSW degree acquire more educational debt?
 - > Are some regions going to see more of a move to DSWs because of the differing markets for clinical practitioners?
 - > Will there be increased pay and reimbursement rates?
 - > Will DSWs emerge in areas beyond clinical practice, e.g., management & administration? Use of the term “advanced practice” rather than “clinical” as it is more inclusive.
- ## > RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS
- ### Continue Dialogue and Reach Out to Additional Stakeholders
- > Continue trans-social work discussions/dialogue about emergence of advanced practice doctorates in social work, including through the CSWE Leadership Roundtable.
 - > Encourage discussion through dialogues between NASW chapters and social work education programs.
 - > Promote future conversations that include the voice of students who are pursuing advanced practice doctorates.
 - > Broaden discussion to engage additional stakeholder including organizations that hire and pay for social work services; non-traditional (on-line) social work education programs; and federal agencies.
- ### Support Innovation While Considering Guidelines and Standards
- > Continue to define and differentiate levels of social work practice and their expectations and competencies – BSW, MSW, Advanced Practice MSW, and DSW, PhD.



- > Track growth and development of programs and their common and unique characteristics.
- > Determine process and auspices for developing guidelines that set broad parameters, phase in standards, and do not stifle innovation. Consider at what point full guidelines, like the GADE Quality Guidelines should be developed and by whom and at what point accreditation of programs might be pursued.

Thoughtfully Examine, Study and Report on Outcomes and Results

- > Create mechanisms to continually monitor and assess status.
- > Continue to look at cost-benefit of DSW.
- > Continue to look at impact of DSW growth on commitment to the MSW as a terminal degree.

- > Examine the impact DSW program development might have on advanced practice credentials (BCD, NASW Credentials) and licensing.
- > Explore reasons for high interest level and attraction of social workers of color to pursue advanced practice doctorates in social work. Consider what can be learned not just in terms of DSW programs, but what can be transferred to attracting students of color to the profession overall.
- > Create scholarship about advanced practice doctorates in social work, including pursuing a special issue or section in high impact social work journals (e.g., NASW journals); and develop a process to disseminate outcomes from both PhD and DSW dissertations and capstone projects to inform the profession.

> SUMMARY

Convening representatives from practice, legal regulation, education and research provided a valuable venue to better understand the emergence of the new DSW in social work. The lessons learned from the other disciplines were instructive. It highlighted the roles that outside forces (for example, Institute of Medicine reports), knowledge development, practice changes and practice specializations have had in their own evolutions. Hearing in detail from three of the current DSW programs provided an opportunity to explore the similarities and differences among these programs as well as how they might be distinguished from PhD programs in social work. The role that DSWs can have in both knowledge development and knowledge transfer was

described, and the ability of the DSW programs to attract a diverse pool of students was an important marker. There is clear interest in shrinking the research-practice divide as well. It is evident from this conversation that more advanced practice programs will emerge over the next several years –

some with a clinical focus and others with a more administrative or management focus. We need to track these developments, examine what kind of guidelines would be useful, and create scholarship about the programs and their outcomes. The engagement of both the academic and practice

communities, including employers and payers, in on-going conversations about how we can ensure that the social work profession is the best that it can be is essential.

For more information and for the full report, visit SocialWorkPolicy.org.

This think tank was a collaborative endeavor of NASW, CSWE, BPD, ASWB, GADE, NADD, SSWR & SLG. The NASW Foundation thanks our collaborating host organizations and the nine supporting schools of social work (Boston College, Case Western Reserve University, New York University, Ohio State University, Rutgers University, University of Denver, University of Michigan, University of Southern California, and University of Tennessee).



ABOUT THE SOCIAL WORK POLICY INSTITUTE

The **Social Work Policy Institute** was established in 2009 and is a division of the NASW Foundation. Its mission is:

- > To strengthen social work's voice in public policy deliberations.
- > To inform policy-makers through the collection and dissemination of information on social work effectiveness.
- > To create a forum to examine current and future issues in health care and social service delivery.

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