

Social work learning from Tribunal case: Pomare Lumsden

Our social work team at the SWRB has had a look at the outcomes of a recent case heard by the Social Workers Complaints and Disciplinary Tribunal and we wanted to share our learning with social workers in the field.

The [Tribunal](#) is reserved for the most serious disciplinary cases. A Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) sends charges to the Tribunal if it believes a social worker is guilty of professional misconduct or of conduct unbecoming of a social worker.

The Tribunal recently considered a charge against a registered social worker, who was convicted in the District Court of two drug offences, including supplying methamphetamine to a client for whom he was the approved caregiver. The social worker was censured and his registration was cancelled.

The case highlights a number of incidences where Principle five of the [Code of Conduct](#) has been breached. Our team's interpretation of Principle five is that it requires social workers to promote the needs of a client by ensuring they never abuse, neglect, harm or exploit clients in any way. That means social workers can never engage in any action that demeans the dignity of a client or misuse their power in the client practitioner relationship.

Our team's interpretation of Principle one of the Code of Conduct is that it requires us to act with integrity and honesty to maintain our professional boundaries by being reliable, dependable, and trustworthy. By doing so we enhance public trust and the trust of our often-vulnerable clients and their family, whānau and communities. The public have an expectation that they can place their trust in social workers, that they will be properly cared for and their safety will be protected.

In situations, such as this recent case, where a social worker has supplied drugs to a client and/or has engaged in a relationship beyond the boundaries of a professional role, they risk being censured and/or suspended or having their registration cancelled or registration. Regardless of the mitigating factors a social worker may face in their own lives, they need to ensure they are referring to the Code of Conduct when deciding what actions are appropriate or inappropriate.

Our reflection as social workers come from being in a regulatory space; we are not providing a legal opinion or a summary of Tribunal findings. As social workers we have a kete full of tools for our practice, the SWRB Code of Conduct, ANZASW Code of Ethics, supervision, and ongoing professional development that support us to uphold the safety and wellbeing of others while also enhancing social work professionalism.