



## Balance and rhythm



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A few weeks ago I watched “The Evolution of Juggling,” a TED Talk by Jay Gilligan on TEDxHelsinki, where he discussed the differences and similarities among jugglers from North America and Europe, and the different shapes, materials, and techniques used in juggling. He stated that juggling has a rhythm and steady beat that talented jugglers must develop to succeed.

I was impressed with the precision of the Juggler—how the performer keeps multiple objects in the air, moving them together in harmony for all to see. Juggling truly is an art form, with certain dynamic principles that make it work: maintaining balance and control, while taking risks; adding complexity to performance, while giving the appearance of simplicity; and creating excitement, while not dropping any flying objects!

It seems to me that juggling is a fitting analogy for the implementation phases of the ASWB Strategic Plan to date. The responsiveness and forethought of the 2013 ASWB board, staff, and delegate assembly set the stage for the association to take on multiple interrelated projects that depend on each other to move forward. I would like to describe three current ASWB projects—building collaborative international relationships, setting regulatory

standards for electronic practice, and licensee mobility—that require the dynamic principles of juggling.

### *International relationships*

In July, Dr. Dorinda Noble, ASWB’s president, and I had the opportunity and privilege to participate in the 2014 conference of the International Federation of Social Workers in Melbourne, Australia. While there, we attended the preconference meeting of the International Network of Social Work Regulators (INSWR). The INSWR includes social work regulators from New Zealand, England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, and the United States. Social workers from Australia, who expect to implement regulatory legislation in the near future, also attended. The four-hour agenda consisted of reports from each organization of critical accomplishments of the past year and challenges going forward, and a lively discussion of commonalities across countries. The meeting gave attendees an appreciation of differences created by legal, structural, and political “contexts.”

A key commonality among countries is regulators’ dedication to the mission of public protection through setting minimum standards for safe,

competent, and ethical practice. All countries set qualifying standards that require levels of social work education and that strive to promote “equivalency” in educational requirements to permit registration/licensure mobility across jurisdictions. Regulators also set qualifying standards for “fitness to practice” or “good moral character”; but how countries define and assess these standards differs. For example, the U.S. uses background checks, while Wales relies on self-evaluation. Most countries require practitioners to demonstrate continuing competency; for example, by acquiring continuing education credits or having practice skills assessed by a third party.



Since all regulation is “local,” differences naturally exist. Each country is bound by its own governmental and legal structures, which are controlled and affected by local and national politics. By statute, many countries combine the roles of the professional association, whose purpose is to protect the profession and advocate for professionals, with the professional regulatory function. Some countries regulate both degreed social workers and nondegreed social service workers employed by the different ministries, such as children’s services or aging adult services. Some countries emphasize rehabilitation of professionals who have strayed from professional behavior, while countries like the U.S. provide sanctions and discipline for licensed professionals who harm clients or violate

practice standards. Finally, it appears that the use of an objective, high-stakes examination to demonstrate minimal competence to become licensed/registered may be unique to the U.S. and certain Canadian provinces.

The major “takeaway” from these conversations is the importance of understanding the context in which regulation occurs to protect the public. There is much to be gained by maintaining a worldwide support system as each of us juggles the educational, professional, and regulatory roles for the social work profession.

### *Electronic Practice and Licensee Mobility*

Interestingly, ASWB took part in two presentations focusing on social work licensee mobility and electronic practice at the IFSW conference. During the INSWR panel, I presented on licensee mobility. This is definitely a hot topic across the world. Dr. Noble and I outlined the draft work of the ASWB International Technology Task Force, chaired by Dr. Frederic Reamer and including social work educators, practitioners, and regulators from the United States, Canada, Ireland, Wales, and New Zealand. Regulatory standards for electronic practice are being developed in the following areas: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, boundaries in the professional relationship, colleague to colleague relationships, competency, documentation and recordkeeping, and jurisdictional boundaries.

Social work educators and practitioners at the conference were particularly interested in the uses of technology in education and

practice, but technology was not on the international “regulatory radar” to the same extent that it is in North America. I believe that the work of the ASWB International Technology Task Force is trendsetting for both electronic practice and mobility—other countries will benefit as they take these standards and translate them into their own regulatory context.

As electronic practice becomes more prevalent, the urgency grows for the social work regulatory community to tackle issues of licensee mobility across jurisdictions. In response, ASWB has designed both the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Delegate Assembly in Boise, Idaho, and the 2015 Spring Education Meeting in Seattle, Washington, to continue these important conversations about electronic practice and licensee mobility with our members. Using live-feed technology, we will beam Dr. Reamer from Rhode Island to Boise to unveil the first draft of the “Regulatory Standards for Electronic Practice.” Delegates will be able to take part in a Q & A session with Dr. Reamer in real time.

The ASWB Board of Directors chose Mobility to be the theme of the 2015 Spring Education Meeting. The Regulatory Education and Leadership (REAL) Committee is planning a highly participatory experience for attendees. Regulators from the fields of medicine, nursing, and pharmacy will discuss their efforts over the years to achieve licensee mobility and to regulate telehealth practice, highlighting their processes and challenges. They will, of course, dispense valuable advice. Current consistencies

across jurisdictions in social work will be presented. Dr. Reamer will discuss the uses of technology in social work education and practice, and attendees will be able to meet members of the ASWB International Technology Task Force. Other speakers are being contacted to add to the conversation. We will end the two-day conference with World Café “conversational leadership” sessions. The summary report from the World Café will be compiled and distributed to all member boards.

As you can see, the projects that ASWB is engaged in require the juggler’s art to keep a balance and a rhythm so that all the elements come together harmoniously. I am excited to share with you some of the highlights of the Annual Meeting and the Spring Education Meeting so that you can see how the international conversations we are participating in are informing the work of ASWB’s volunteers and staff. I hope you share the excitement.