

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN HOSPITAL SETTING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO NEPHROLOGY DEPARTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Social work practice in hospital setting refers to the application of social work knowledge and techniques. Social workers make use of multiple techniques to help the people. Social workers mainly work at three levels as for as health care is concerned like, primary, secondary and tertiary. Social workers play numerous roles in hospitals especially in nephrology, oncology, cardiology departments and so on. There is emergent need for social workers in nephrology department since the patients here undergo stress at various levels. The End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) patients require psychological support and positive reinforcement. Thus the social workers have adequate scope to work in department of Nephrology. Hence the present paper provides information about role of social workers in Nephrology department. The unique roles performed by the social worker are highlighted in the study.

Keywords: Nephrology, end stage renal disease, health education, ,dialysis, transplantation, counseling

INTRODUCTION

Social work is a professional service, based on scientific knowledge and skills in human relations, which assists, individual alone, or in groups, to obtain social and personal satisfaction and independence (Friedlander, 1955). Social workers makes use of different methods and techniques as prescribed by the profession in solving the problems of individual, group and community.

Social work in health care set up refers to the application of social work knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to health care. Social work is involved at various levels of prevention i.e. primary work in health services emphasized understanding illness. Practice was focused on work with sick people and members of their families. Because of the newer emphasis in medical care, the scope of social work has been broadened and now encompasses "the preservation and promotion of health and the prevention as well as cure of disease, consideration is given to psychological factors in prevention of disability as well as in diagnosis and treatment (Skidmore and Milton, 1982). The social worker is in an unique and enviable position to contribute to prevention. Social work is health oriented, conceptually and philosophically. It addresses the strengths of the individual or family in a given situation. As a go- between of services, the social worker is the linkage between the person and a system of support that maintains health, or that may be the means of detecting illness early, or of preventing deterioration of the problem. Social work organizes and develops the community, or mobilizes the resources for doing this. It is often the first to pinpoint needs and to engage in those activities designed to prevent breakdown for the person, the group, or for society. Social work has a resource and service focus and takes the position that no one can be healthy in a sick society (Skidmore and Milton, 1982).

As for as social work in hospital is concerned the social workers collaborate with medicine and a broad range of specialists, including, doctors, nurses, dieticians, physical therapists, pharmacists and hospital administration. This collaboration, termed the "team approach", calls for reciprocal and continuous sharing of ideas and the ability to work harmoniously with other professionals, so the skills and knowledge of each may be used in concert for the benefit of the patient (Beatrice Philips, 1977). The social workers have to perform numerous roles in the hospital especially in Nephrology department which deals with people with

End stage renal disease.

Social work in the health services accepts the World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. In order to reach this goal, the WHO recognizes several factors as essential for health. These factors include peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable eco-system, sustainable resources, social justice, and equity. Since these basic conditions will not be met until, increased attention is given to healthcare.

The constant growth, demands, and changes in health care have had a serious impact on the viability and need for social workers in all areas and settings of health care. Access to timely, comprehensive, and equitable health care for individuals in the United States varies considerably, with significant percentages of many populations having only limited access to health care. The growth in medical technology has offered hope and improved quality of life to many people; yet, the advances in technology have also raised health care costs and introduced social, legal, and ethical dilemmas for individuals, families, and health care providers. These psychosocial implications of health care are what social workers are trained to address (NASW Standards for Social Work Practice, 2005).

The social workers in health care services use the problem solving method in assisting individuals, groups and communities in solving personal and family health problems. Social work is involved at various levels of prevention, they are as follows:

- Primary- health education, encouraging immunizations, good mental health practice in families, prenatal and post natal care.
- Secondary- early screening programmes for detection of disease check ups, encouraging treatment.
- Tertiary or rehabilitation-preventing deterioration/worsening of a disease or problem. (Skidmore and Milton, 1982).

What are the distinguishing knowledge and skill characteristics of medical social work practice?

It is practice in responsible relation to medicine. Its concern is with the welfare of patients and the causal, contributing interrelationships of illness, family failures and breakdown, social stresses, and environmental pressures and influences.

Medical social work is shaped and guided by the attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and acceptable ways of doing things by professionals serving in health care institutions and by the philosophy and practice of modern medicine. It requires knowledge of illness and of the psychological and social impact of disease on the individual, the family and the family interrelationships; it calls for the application and adaptation of social work concepts, principles and ideas to the special needs of hospital and clinic clientele.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Health setting being one of the important area needs social work intervention. The study attempts to present the role of social worker in health setting by using qualitative methodologies. The primary data for the study is developed based on the experiences of the author gained by working in the Nephrology department. The secondary data is mobilized through books and journals. The research design adopted in the study is discursive which aims at describing the role of social workers in health setting specially focusing on Nephrology department.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Role of social worker in Nephrology department

Department of Nephrology mainly works with renal failure patients. There are two alternative ways for end stage renal patients. Firstly dialysis, there are two types of dialysis viz., haemodialysis which is done twice or thrice a week and CAPD (Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis) which is done once in six hours or eight hours. This is also called as home dialysis because patients can do this at home. Second alternative is kidney transplantation that is possible with live donor (any near relative with matching blood

group) or diseased donor transplantation. The patient who undergo dialysis experiences lot of stress. Even the patient who go for transplantation, till transplantation they have to undergo dialysis. Counseling service is very effective for renal failure patients in order to enhance their coping mechanisms. As for as patients who undergo dialysis, regularly needs psychological support, diet counseling and positive reinforcement.

The roles of social workers in Nephrology department are as follows:

1. **Providing psychological support to the patients and their family members**

Both client and the family members need lot of support and positive reinforcement to face the challenges. Patients who undergo dialysis is for life time unless they go for transplantation. Such patients need ray of hope to live and succeed. Transplantation involves two parties, patient (receiver) and the donor. The donor is equally tensed as the patient as he/she has to contribute an organ of the body and many are scared of surgery. E.g. One of the patient was expecting kidney from his wife. Though the wife was interested to donate she was scared about the surgery and also losing of one kidney. So detailed information was given to her about the transplantation and its consequences and she was left free to make choices. Finally she decided to donate one kidney to her husband to save his life.

2. **Providing information and clarifying doubts about dialysis especially for the patients who undergo dialysis for the first time:** Provision of proper information is very essential especially regarding dialysis. Patients of any background when they undergo dialysis for the first time would have lot of dilemmas especially by looking at the machine, inflow and out flow of blood. Social worker should give proper information about dialysis and also its importance.

3. **Diet counselling:** Diet counselling is crucial for renal failure patients because their health depends upon the type of food and liquid consumption. Regular provision of information on food and liquid consumption is very essential. It is not advisable for renal failure patients to take fruits since it contains water and only 500ml liquid (including water, tea/coffee, milk, curdsetc.) per day they can consume. Most of the times these patients lose control on their food especially liquid consumption. Regular counselling is required about their diet.

4. **Assist the family to cooperate with treatment and to support the patient's utilization of medical services:** Cooperation of the family members in treating patient is imperative. Social workers need to sensitize the family members to cooperate with treatment and help the patient in availing the required medical services. E.g. In government hospitals patients may face lot of problems and they may not be knowing what to do and whom to contact.

5. **Pre transplantation counseling, post transplantation counseling, donor counseling and relatives counseling is necessary:** As for as kidney transplantation is concerned counselling the patient is not enough. Key members of the family need to be explained about various aspects related to transplantation. Pre transplantation counselling is for all the three parties that is patient, donor and the family members. Post transplantation counselling is for patient and the relatives. Patient and the donor usually will have fear about surgery and its later consequences. Psycho social support should be given to them to enhance their coping mechanisms.

6. **Enhancing patients coping mechanism to adapt to the changing condition:** Reality orientation to the patient is necessary to make them to adjust to the changing condition. Most of the patients do not realize the need for undergoing dialysis and they become irregular. This aggravates the problem and there are more chances of death. The patients should be mentally prepared to adjust to the situation.

7. **Positive reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement is saying or doing something that will encourage a person to repeat a behavior. When a patient properly maintains diet or regularly undergo dialysis such patients need to be encouraged to repeat their such behaviours which a counselor can do this.

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8. **Participate in policy making process:** The participation of counsellor in policy making process of the hospital is very important which would benefit the client/patient in availing the resources of the hospital and in making pro patient policies
9. **Engage in research to assure a broadening of the knowledge base for successful practice:** Research is one of the area need to be focused by the counsellors identifying client needs and expectations of the hospital. The counsellor can fruitfully engage in research acstivities. For example assessment of mental health of the patients would definitely help in understanding the psychological problems of the patients. Hence a counsellor can focus more on improving the mental health during counselling sessions.
10. **Coordinating with the hospital administration, doctors, nurse, dieticians etc:** It is a multidisciplinary team in the hospital comprising doctors, nurses, social workers/counsellors, administrators and dieticians who should work in a team for the development/improvement of the client. The counsellor coordinates with these experts in promoting health of the patient.

CONCLUSION

Application of social work knowledge and techniques to health care is essential to help the patients, their relatives and the society as a whole. Social workers need to have certain qualities to work with the patients like, pleasant mannerisms, skills like listening, observation, interview, relationship building and communication skills. When a social worker imbibes in him/her certain qualities required for the profession he/she can easily win the confidence of the people. This helps both the social workers and the client in achieving their goals.

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