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Unveiling the Vital Roles of Medical Social Worker in Multidisciplinary Teams in Hospital Settings: Insights from the Literature

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ABSTRACT

This review article seeks to unveil the multifaceted roles of medical social workers in a multidisciplinary team in hospital settings, uncovering insights from the existing literature highlighting their contribution in promoting holistic patients care outcomes and fostering collaborations and coordination as well as overall functioning of the healthcare system. This article reviewed online research articles on the roles of medical social workers within a multidisciplinary team in hospital settings. Keywords used in conducting the literature review were: 'Medical social workers,' 'hospital social workers,' 'roles of medical/hospital social workers,' and 'multidisciplinary teams in hospital/healthcare settings.' The Boolean Operator Conjunctive "AND" was employed in the association of these keywords to augment the scope of inquiry. The databases used for literature searches were Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, Semantic Scholar Science Direct, and Research Gate. The articles conclude that medical social workers play vital roles within a multidisciplinary team in hospital settings, such as Service provision, The role of patient advocacy and support, Resources mobilization, the role of discharge planning, and Interprofessional collaboration in chronic disease management within a team. Therefore, it is pertinent that medical social workers are vital members of a multidisciplinary team; their vital roles must be recognized, appreciated, and supported to foster the quality of healthcare provided to patients in a hospital setting.

INTRODUCTION

Medical social work involves providing comprehensive support in healthcare settings focusing on ethical treatment, patient advocacy and addressing the need of the vulnerable population. Medical social workers enhances healthcare delivery and health equity and social justice (Bharadwaj & Koujalgi, 2024). Medical social work is viewed as one of the most significant fields in practice. It has been acknowledged as the first subspecialty discipline to practice in hospital, public health, and clinical settings (Allen & Spitzer, 2016). The overall goal of social work in healthcare is to prevent and reduce negative social and psychosocial consequences of diseases and to encourage and teach patients how to use their own resources (Sverker *et al.*, 2017).

Generally, the role of medical social workers has increasingly gain a recognition worldwide for their contribution towards comprehensive and quality health care delivery particularly in hospital settings (Bharadwaj & Koujalgi, 2024). Medical social workers perform their roles in hospital settings through the use of multidisciplinary approach which has proven to be an effective part of healthcare treatments. A multidisciplinary team is defined as a group of professionals that specialize in different disciplines that come together to deliver quality health care that addresses the patient's well-being (Allen & Spitzer, 2016). Using this approach allows the team to provide better-quality outcomes and to enhance client satisfaction; a team may be comprised of members from the same disciplinary background. An example would be

a team of medical social workers who discuss treatment plans according to the results of a patient's assessment. Working in a team allows for individual ideas to be heard and as a group develop a specific treatment plan (J Langford & Craig Keaton, 2022).

This review article seeks to unveil the multifaceted roles of medical social workers in a multidisciplinary team in healthcare settings, uncovering insights from the existing literature highlighting their contribution in promoting holistic patients care outcomes and fostering collaborations and coordination as well as overall functioning of the healthcare system.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this article, both academic sources and gray literatures were reviewed. A traditional methodology for conducting a literature review was utilized in the composition of this article (Okech, 2018). It involved online searches of articles on medical/hospital social work practice in hospital/healthcare settings. Key words used in conducting literature review were: 'Medical social workers,' 'hospital social workers,' 'roles of medical/hospital social workers,' and 'multidisciplinary teams in hospital/healthcare settings'. The Boolean Operator Conjunctive "AND" was employed in the association of these keywords to augment the scope of inquiry. The databases used for literature searches were Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, semantic scholar science direct and research gate; only articles from 2010-2024 were found to be relevant and included in this review.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Roles of Medical Social Workers in a Multidisciplinary Team within Healthcare Settings

Service provision. A study conducted by Tadic *et al.*, (2020) reveals that medical social workers within an inter-professional healthcare teams are commonly involved in direct, one-on-one patient service delivery, including psychosocial services, primary mental healthcare services, prevention and health promotion, liaison with other organizations, counseling and home visits services, end of life/palliative care services, educating patients and they influenced the programs offered at the practice level. Medical social workers conduct psychosocial assessment within a multidisciplinary teams in a hospital to identify psychosocial needs of a patients to inform patients treatment plan (Birudu & Reddy, 2018).

The Role of Patients Advocate and Support

Advocacy is a cornerstone of social work, aiming to uplift marginalized groups and address systemic injustices (University of North Dakota, 2024). Medical social workers advocates for patients' rights and needs ensuring ethical treatment and transparency in healthcare delivery (Bharadwaj & Koujalgi, 2024). Moreover, medical social workers provide emotional support and counseling, particularly in complex cases such as elder mistreatment (Elman *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, advocating patients' rights and needs promote health equity and addresses social determinants of health (Desrosiers *et al.*, 2016). The advantage of providing emotional support is that it helps patients to adapt to their health conditions, significantly improving their quality of life (Dosari *et al.*, 2020).

Resources Mobilization

medical social workers connects patients with available community resources ensuring they receive necessary services and support (Musuguri & Makuu, 2024). For instance, assisting patients in accessing financial aids, transportation and support services (AL Dosari *et al.*, 2020), providing education to individuals and families about the available resources and empowering patients to utilize these resources effectively (Musuguri & Makuu, 2024). Furthermore, medical social workers play a critical role in linking healthcare systems with community resources which is vital for comprehensive care (Shrivastava *et al.*, 2014).

The Role of Discharge Planning

Medical social workers are responsible for discharge planners within healthcare settings when working within a multidisciplinary teams fostering smooth transition from the hospital to patients home settings. Their responsibilities including conducting a comprehensive assessments to identify patients emotional, social and practical needs ensuring that discharge plan goes together with individuals circumstances (Balaž Gilja, 2023). The comprehensive assessments also includes evaluation of the social contexts of the patients which

is critical for effective care coordination post-discharge (Szalados, 2021). The discharging process has to be done in a collaborative way where by social workers helps to integrate health, medical and welfare services to support patients in the community (Lee & Sung, 2022). Furthermore, medical social workers addresses barriers and ethical dilemmas to discharge such as lack of social supports or health complications which may delay the process (Heenan, 2023).

Inter-professional collaboration in chronic diseases management within a team. Medical social workers collaborate with staff to create comprehensive care plan to improves patients treatment outcomes (Musuguri & Makuu, 2024). Within the multidisciplinary team in the process of management of diseases like diabetes and depression their role is vital for addressing social determinants of health facilitating accessibility to necessary services (Bharadwaj & Koujalgi, 2024). However, the literature suggest such as lack of clear understanding of among healthcare practitioners regarding the full scope of social work hinder effective collaboration (Musuguri & Makuu, 2024). The article asserts that, this requires ongoing education and awareness to recognize the contribution of medical social workers in healthcare settings. As recognition will enhances communication and coordination among healthcare providers (McLaughlin Davis & Morley, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This article reveals the vital roles of medical social workers within multidisciplinary teams in hospital settings, highlighting their crucial contribution to patients care and healthcare delivery. The article draw conclusion from the literature that the collaboration between medical social workers and healthcare practitioners within a multidisciplinary teams in a hospital enhances patients care outcomes, promote health equity and justice within a hospital settings, enhances communication and coordination among healthcare providers. Therefore its pertinent that medical social workers are vital members of a multidisciplinary teams, their vital roles must be recognized, appreciated and supported to foster quality of healthcare provided to patients in a hospital settings which significantly will enhances overall effectiveness of healthcare delivery systems.

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