

BRIEF COMMUNICATION

SPECIALIZED PATHS IN HOSPITAL SOCIAL WORK: AN EXPLORATION

Yatheesh Bharadwaj H S¹, Ashok S.Kori², Sateesh R Koujalgi³, Sachin Prasad⁴, Ranjani Vakoda⁵

¹M.Phil Scholar, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, DIMHANS, ²Psychiatric Social Worker, DIMHANS, ³Head of the Department (I/C) and Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, DIMHANS, ⁴M.Phil Ist Year Scholar, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, DIMHANS, ⁵M.Phil Ist Year Scholar, Department of Psychiatric Social Work, DIMHANS, Dharwad, Karnataka

Correspondence: Yatheesh Bharadwaj H S, e-mail: yatheesh428@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: This study focusses on the social work profession in hospital setting. the integration of professional social work has become increasingly vital for addressing patients intricate psychosocial needs and enhancing overall well-being. **Aim:** The main objective of the current study is to emphasize the important roles of professional social workers play in promoting comprehensive patient care, fostering collaboration between different disciplines, supporting disadvantaged communities and instigating systematic enhancements in healthcare systems. **Methods & Materials:** Existing literature was used to collect secondary data for the current study. **Results:** The authors have understood that professional social work's contribution becoming very useful. In the neurology department, social workers serve as integral team members, employing a range of interventions to support patients and their families. Similarly, the role of social workers as ENT Social Worker, Orthopedic Social Worker, OB/GYN Social Worker, Hematology Social Worker, Pulmonary Social Worker, Gastro Social Worker, URO Social Worker, Onco- Social Work, Psychiatric Social Worker, Geriatric Social Worker, Emergency Social Worker, Dermato Social Worker, Social Workers in Community Medicine and Rehabilitation Social Workers are very crucial in the current health care setting. **Conclusion:** The current study underscores the growing recognition of integrating professional social work into modern healthcare systems to address clients' complex psychosocial needs and improve health outcomes.

Keywords: Social work, hospital setting, healthcare system

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary healthcare systems, the integration of professional social work has become increasingly vital for addressing patients' intricate psychosocial needs and

enhancing overall well-being. Social workers play diverse roles across specialized medical areas, tailoring their services to effectively address challenges posed by various

conditions and patient populations. Their contributions span patient advocacy, psychosocial support, care coordination, addressing social determinants of health, counseling, crisis intervention, and more. As healthcare grows in complexity and diversity, the importance of professional social work in promoting holistic patient care and driving systemic improvements within healthcare systems has never been more pronounced. The scope of professional social work has been expanding since many years and getting good recognition in different specialties such as neurology, oncology, psychiatry, community medicine, rehabilitation, emergency medicine, geriatrics, pulmonary care, otolaryngology, orthopedics, obstetrics and gynecology, hematology, gastroenterology, urology and dermatology etc.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective of the current study is to emphasize the important roles of professional social workers play in promoting comprehensive patient care, fostering collaboration between different disciplines, supporting disadvantaged communities and instigating systemic enhancements in healthcare systems. The few good studies through secondary data have revealed different roles, difficulties, importance and impact of professional social work in various fields.

METHODS & MATERIALS

Existing literature was used to collect secondary data for the current study, which included academic journals, books, published reports, published articles, reports related to social work profession, relevant websites and documents. The literature review focused on sources which are related to current study. For the current study, database like Google Scholar, PubMed were used.

FINDINGS

The authors have understood that professional social work’s contribution becoming very useful and their designations are different in various departments of hospital setting as below:

Neuro Social Worker	ENT Social Worker	Ortho Social Worker	Ob/Gyn Social Worker	Pulmonary Social Worker
Hemato Social Worker	Gastro Social Worker	Onco-social Work	Uro- Social Worker	Psychiatric Social Worker
Geriatric Social Worker	Emergency Social Worker	Social Workers In Community Medicine	Rehabilitation Social Workers	Dermato Social Worker

Neuro Social Worker: In the neurology department, social workers serve as integral team members, employing a range of interventions to support patients and their families. Social workers in neurology department play a multifaceted role in supporting clients, their families and caregivers affected by neurological conditions. Through their expertise in psychosocial assessment, intervention and advocacy, they enhance the holistic care and well-being of individuals living with neurological disorders, fostering resilience, empowerment and meaningful quality of life. They also play a critical role in communicating difficult prognoses and locating caregivers who may have left the emergency ward without authorization, particularly those in need of financial assistance. Despite their potential, neuro social workers are often underutilized as valuable resources.

Hospitalization due to neurological issues is a distressing experience that can impact both the physical and psychological well-being of patients, potentially affecting their recovery and medical adherence. Patients with conditions like stroke, Guillain-Barré syndrome, neuro-infections, and seizure disorders often require psychiatric social work services to address acute psychosocial stressors. These stressors may include a lack

of understanding about the illness, prognosis, and financial constraints.

The study done by Kuppuswamy et al. (2021) examined the utilization of psychiatric social work services in neurology settings, finding that out of 15,939 patients, 159 were referred for such services. The majority of these patients received neuro-education (61.6%), followed by assistance with accessing welfare benefits (54%), supportive psychotherapy (43.1%), pre-discharge counseling (35.2%), crisis intervention (one-third), family interventions (12.6%), and assistance with hospital charges waiver (10.7%). Additionally, 2.5% of cases were referred for unknown psychosocial interventions to address administrative issues and locate family members.

ENT Social Worker: Social workers play a critical role in the ENT department by offering extensive psychosocial support to patients and their families dealing with ENT-related conditions. They provide emotional counselling, help patients understand their condition and treatment options, and advocate for them within the healthcare system. By coordinating care between ENT specialists and other healthcare professionals, they ensure effective communication and collaboration to improve patient outcomes. Social workers also offer important support to family members, provide crisis intervention during emergencies, and facilitate connections to community resources, support groups, and rehabilitation services. Through preventive education and community outreach programs, they strive to increase awareness and encourage early intervention for ENT health. Social workers in the ENT department have a crucial role in addressing the overall needs of patients and families, ultimately contributing to their well-being and quality of life during their treatment process in ENT department.

Orthopaedic Social Worker: The Orthopaedic department is a specialized medical unit within a hospital or healthcare facility. It focuses on the diagnosis, treatment, and management of musculoskeletal conditions and injuries affecting the bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, tendons, and nerves. In a recent study conducted by Aurélie Pèdre in 2024, titled "The Role of the Social Worker in the Orthopaedics and Traumatology Department," the intricate responsibilities of Ortho-social workers within orthopaedic departments were elucidated. Central to their role is the management of a challenging caseload of inpatients, where effective prioritization ensures timely attention to complex cases. With a specialized focus on orthopaedic inpatients and their families, the scope of social work services encompasses several vital facets.

OB/GYN Social Worker: The OB/GYN social work staffs are dedicated professionals specializing in women's health, offering counselling, health education, and emotional support to patients and their families. With master's level training and expertise, they address a wide spectrum of issues related to pregnancy, family planning, and maternal health. Their services encompass support for routine and high-risk pregnancies, family planning guidance, HIV counselling, and assistance with pregnancy loss and bereavement. They are equipped to address concerns surrounding adjustment to pregnancy, postpartum challenges, stress related to high-risk pregnancies, evaluation of postpartum mood disorders, infertility, and other medical and surgical concerns. Additionally, they provide maternal and infant health social work services, offering psychosocial support, health assessments, and interventions tailored to the individual's perinatal health status.

Pulmonary Social Worker: Social workers play a pivotal role in providing comprehensive support and assistance to individuals living with COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease) and their families. Through various services and interventions, they address multifaceted challenges associated with COPD, ultimately enhancing the overall well-being of those affected. Firstly, social workers offer invaluable emotional support and counseling, assisting clients in managing their stress, anxiety, and depression while fostering coping mechanisms to adapt to lifestyle changes brought on by the condition. Additionally, they conduct thorough assessments of the home environment and facilitate access to community resources, home care services, and caregiver support groups, ensuring individuals with COPD receive adequate support to thrive in their home settings. Pulmonary social workers also provide pulmonary rehabilitation services. (Robert et al, 2018)

Hematology Social Worker: Social workers role in blood related disorders is vital. They play as a multidisciplinary team member in the hematology department. The hemato - social workers are available to provide counseling and guidance, crisis intervention and referrals to community services and support groups. They have expertise in understanding the impact of various blood related diseases such as Leukaemia; Lymphoma, Myeloma , Leukaemia/Lymphoma, Coagulation disorders, Haemophilia, Thrombotic disorders , Platelet disorders , Haemolytic anaemia , White cell disorders, Haemoglobinopathies , Red cell disorders – Anaemia, Polycythemia etc on various dimensions - on work, school, finances, relationship, mood, behaviour, social support. This is confirmed by Valerie fund in their article "Hematology/Oncology Social Workers.

Having psychosocial clinicians in the department of hematology is required.

Gastro Social Worker: The significance of social workers in pediatric gastroenterology was underscored in a study by Shayana Hulbert in 2023. Specializing in providing support to individuals with gastrointestinal (GI) conditions and their families, gastro social workers play a vital role in addressing the unique psychosocial challenges associated with conditions such as inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), celiac disease, liver disease, and gastrointestinal cancers. These professionals offer a comprehensive range of services aimed at enhancing patients' overall well-being and quality of life. This includes providing emotional support and counseling to help individuals cope with the stress and anxiety often accompanying GI disorders. Moreover, they assist patients in navigating the complex healthcare system, coordinating care between specialists, and advocating for patients' needs. Additionally, gastro social workers address social determinants of health, such as housing instability, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and employment concerns, which can impact patients' ability to manage their conditions effectively.

Onco-Social Work: The Association of Oncology Social Work's (AOSW) Standards and Scope of Practice delineate the multifaceted nature of OSW activities, emphasizing their service to individuals, institutions, communities, and the profession. OSWs play a vital role in supporting healthcare providers, alleviating stress, grief, and moral distress within clinical care teams. Core responsibilities of OSWs include social and economic assessment, counseling, and post-treatment follow-up, with a focus on identifying unmet needs and tailoring

interventions to enhance patients' quality of life. While empirical evidence on the efficacy of social work interventions in oncology is limited, studies suggest that access to OSW services can significantly improve patients' quality of life, particularly interventions focusing on support and information dissemination (National Association of Social Workers, 2021).

URO- Social Worker: Uro-social workers are specialized providers who offer comprehensive support to patients with urological conditions. They provide emotional support, conduct assessments, offer counseling, and connect patients with resources in the community. Additionally, they advocate for patients' rights, coordinate care among healthcare team members, educate and support families, and provide end-of-life care when needed.

Psychiatric Social Worker: Psychiatry encompasses the identification, prevention, and treatment of mental health conditions through various approaches, including medication, therapy and other treatment methods. Diagnosis relies on standardized manuals like the DSM-5 and ICD. Treatment settings vary from inpatient to outpatient based on severity. Interdisciplinary collaboration is common in psychiatric research. In inpatient settings, psychiatric social workers conduct psychosocial assessments, provide various types psychosocial interventions, and assist with discharge planning. They offer supportive therapy and psycho-education to patients and families. Post-discharge, they continue need based assessments and facilitate community resources. In emergency care, psychiatric social workers offer crisis intervention and counselling services depend upon the case. Outpatient services focus on assessments, therapy, and referrals to support community-

based care. Overall, psychiatric social workers play essential roles in addressing mental health needs across diverse settings.

Geriatric Social Worker: Gerontological social workers, in particular, possess specialized expertise in working with elderly people and their caregivers. This branch of social work focuses on addressing the aging process, supporting caregivers, and resolving issues specific to the elderly population. As the elderly population continues to grow, the role of gerontological social workers becomes increasingly vital in providing comprehensive care and support to elderly individuals and their communities (Popli, Ushvinder & Panday, Rishi, 2018)

Emergency Social Worker: Several studies emphasize the critical role of social work services within emergency departments (EDs) in addressing the complex psychosocial needs of patients. Through thematic analysis and qualitative research, few studies highlight various functions performed by emergency social workers:

1. Conducting comprehensive psychosocial assessments and aiding in discharge planning.
2. Formulating treatment strategies that consider the holistic needs of patients.
3. Collaborating with interdisciplinary teams and empowering patients and families.
4. Offering resourceful counselling and facilitating referrals to community resources.
5. Providing crisis intervention and supportive counselling for grief and adjustment issues.
6. Serving as educators of mental health topics and cultural brokers within the ED setting Engaging in diverse roles across pre-EMS, during emergency and post-EMS phases.

Social Workers in Community Medicine:

The research studies highlight the significant role of social work practice in community settings, particularly within the context of community medicine and public health. These studies emphasize the importance of collaboration between communities, health delivery systems, and social work professionals to identify needs and address challenges effectively. Ruth et al. (2008) explored motivations and experiences of graduates from MSW/MPH programs, highlighting the potential for MSW/MPH alumni to strengthen public health infrastructure through their dual expertise. Additionally, the technical and operational guidelines for rural and urban health training centers underscore the diverse roles of social workers in community health, including health profiling, communication strategies, advocacy, and facilitating partnerships with voluntary agencies. Overall, these studies underscore the critical role of social work in promoting community health and well-being through collaboration, advocacy, and interdisciplinary practice.

Dermato Social Worker: In modern dermatology, there's growing recognition of the influence of patients' personality traits and environmental factors on skin diseases. Social workers are increasingly integral to dermatology services, addressing the psychosocial aspects of conditions through a case work approach. Studies, such as Abeyrathna et al. (2023), highlight the significant distress experienced by university students with dermatological conditions, emphasizing the importance of psychosocial clinicians in addressing these needs. Similarly, de Zoysa (2013) underscores the necessity for psychotherapy training for dermatologists, indicating the evolving landscape of dermatological care to incorporate

comprehensive psychosocial support.

Rehabilitation Social Workers:

Rehabilitation social workers are essential in helping individuals recover from injuries, surgeries, or chronic illnesses by providing comprehensive support and guidance. They assess patients' psychosocial needs, develop tailored rehabilitation plans, and collaborate closely with patients and their families. By offering counseling and emotional support, rehabilitation social workers empower individuals to navigate challenges, build resilience, and achieve their recovery goals.

CONCLUSION

The current study underscores the growing recognition of integrating professional social work into modern healthcare systems to address clients' complex psychosocial needs and improve health outcomes. It delves into the diverse roles of social workers across specialized domains such as neurology, oncology, psychiatry, and others within healthcare. Drawing from literature in social work, healthcare, and hospital management, the study aims to comprehensively explore the responsibilities, challenges, and contributions of social workers in each area. Emphasizing their role in promoting holistic patient care, facilitating collaboration, advocating for vulnerable populations, and driving systemic improvements, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the significance of professional social work in contemporary healthcare.

REFERENCES

- Abeyrathna, P. (2023). Common Dermatological Complaints and Its Psychosocial Impact: a descriptive cross sectional study among undergraduates of an outstation university of Sri Lanka. *Anuradhapura*

- Medical Journal*, 17 (2): 20-24,
- Abhijit, D. (2012). Neurological Disability: A Hidden Epidemic for India. PMID: 23170012
- Auerbach, Charles & Mason, Susan. 2010. The Value of the Presence of Social Work in Emergency Departments. *Social work in health care*. 49. 314-26.
- Bekelman, D. B., Feser, W., Morgan, B., Welsh, C. H., Parsons, E. C., Paden, G., Baron, A., Hattler, B., McBryde, C., Cheng, A., Lange, A. V., & Au, D. H. (2024). Nurse and Social Worker Palliative Telecare Team and Quality of Life in Patients With COPD, Heart Failure, or Interstitial Lung Disease: The ADAPT Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA*, 331(3), 212–223.
- Chien, K. A., Thomas, C., Cooley, V., Weinstein, T., Murray, K. F., Muir, L., Hayes, C., Gold, B. D., Gerber, L. M., Sauer, C. G., & Tomer, G. (2023). Physician Burnout in Pediatric Gastroenterology. *Journal of Pediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition*, 76(1), 25–32.
- Damron-Rodriguez, J., Lawrance, F. P., Barnett, D., & Simmons, J. (2006). Developing geriatric social work competencies for field education. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 48(1-2), 139–160.
- Das, A. & Dey, N. (2016). Role of Oncology Social Worker's in India Amit Das and Nabanita Dey. *Indian Journal of Applied Research*. 6. 566 - 568.
- De Zoysa P. (2013). Psychological interventions in dermatology. *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, 58(1), 56–60.
- Heinsch, M., & Nightingale, S. (2019). Integrating psychosocial approaches into the management of childhood functional gastrointestinal disorders: a role for social work. *Social Work in Health Care*, 58(5), 431–443.
- Kamrujjaman, M. D., Demetriou, C., Cuartas Álvarez, T., Castro Delgado, R. (2023). The Role of Social Work for Emergency Medical Services (EMS): A Systematic Review. *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 38(5), 628–635.
- Kuppusamy, C., Shanmugam, B., & Ezhumalai, S. (2021). Psychiatric Social Work Services In Neurology Emergency Care Setting. *National Journal of Professional Social Work*, 22(2), 160–167.
- Madsen, J., Vila, C., Anand, P. (2024). Social Work in Outpatient Neurology at a Safety-Net Hospital: A 200-Hour Profile. *Journal of Immigrant Minority Health*, 26, 247–252.
- Pasquale, N.M., Seehaus, M., Horton, R. (2011). The role of social work in an interdisciplinary pain clinic team treating rheumatologic/musculoskeletal conditions.
- Pèdre A. (2024). Le rôle de l'assistant social en service d'orthopédie et traumatologie [The role of the social worker in the orthopedics and traumatology department]. *Revue de l'infirmière*, 73(297), 26–27.
- Perlmutter, E. Y., Herron, F. B., Rohan, E. A., Thomas, E. (2022). Oncology social work practice behaviors: a national survey of AOSW members. *Journal of psychosocial oncology*, 40(2), 137–151.
- Public health reports (Washington, D.C. : 1974), 123 Suppl 2(Suppl 2), 71– Social work practice and community health: a planning-implementation model. *Social work in health care*, 6(2), 39–51.

- Roberts, N. J., Kidd, L., Kirkwood, K., Cross, J., Partridge, M. R. (2018). A systematic review of the content and delivery of education in pulmonary rehabilitation programmes. *Respiratory medicine*, 145, 161–181.
- Rushlow, Beverly, "A Social Work Assessment of Interventions with the Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease Population with Regards to Intimacy" (1997). Masters Theses. 434.
- Ruth, B. J., Sisco, S., Wyatt, J., Bethke, C., Bachman, S. S., Piper, T. M. (2008). Public health and social work: training dual professionals for the contemporary workplace.
- Shyna Hulbert et al, 2023. Putting the social in social work: the importance of social workers in pediatric gastroenterology. Oregon Health and Science University.
- Snyder, C. S., Wesley, S. C., Lin, M. B., & May, J. D. (2008). Bridging the gap: gerontology and social work education. *Gerontology & geriatrics education*, 28(4), 1–21.
- Thierau, D. (1998). Sozialarbeit in geriatrischen Kliniken—zwischen Autonomie und Funktionalisierung [Social work in geriatric clinics—between autonomy and functional organization]. *Zeitschrift für Gerontologie und Geriatrie*, 31(5), 338–342.
- Townsend, D., Accurso-Massana, C., Lechman, C., Duder, S., Chasen, M. (2010). Cancer nutrition rehabilitation program: the role of social work. *Current oncology (Toronto, Ont.)*, 17(6), 12–17.
- Whalen, E., Ely, E., Brown, A. (2021). The role of a multidisciplinary team in a pediatric pulmonary hypertension center. *Pediatric Pulmonology*, 56(3), 630–635.
- Williams J, Amerson EH, Chang AY. How Dermatologists Can Address the Structural and Social Determinants of Health—From Awareness to Action. *JAMA Dermatol*. 2022;158(4):351–352.
- Wrenn, K., & Rice, N. (1994). Social-work services in an emergency department: an integral part of the health care safety net. *Academic emergency medicine*. *Journal of the Society for Academic Emergency Medicine*, 1(3), 247–253.

Conflict of interest: None

Role of funding source: None