



## SOCIAL WORKERS AS FRONT-LINE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

### INTRODUCTION

The role of social workers in the wider health care system is critical, as they are frontline professionals who bridge the gap between health care services and the social determinants of health. They are not confined to traditional welfare assistance; they are also integrated into hospitals, community health centres, mental health facilities, and schools, offering holistic care to vulnerable populations. According to Berkman and Harootyan (2003), social workers in the health care setting are best placed to provide psychosocial care to patients who are often not adequately supported by clinical staff.

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2008) has long recognised that social and economic factors (poverty, housing, education, and discrimination) have a major influence on health outcomes. Social workers have been trained to identify and address these determinants through advocacy, case management, and community-based services. In that sense, they do not act as support personnel; they are part of multidisciplinary health teams. Research by Gehlert and Browne (2012) affirms that when social workers are incorporated into the primary health care environment, hospital readmission rates decrease and patient adherence to treatment plans increases.

One of the most evident areas in which social workers are first responders is mental health. They perform psychosocial evaluations, offer crisis intervention and access to mental health services to those who may otherwise slip through the cracks of formal psychiatric services. Corrigan (2007) asserts that social stigma is one of the greatest impediments to

mental health care and that social workers are in a better position to fight these at the grassroots level through advocacy and community engagement, which they are in a unique position to execute due to their training.

Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the irreplaceable importance of social workers in public health emergencies in the most dramatic manner. They served in frontline roles to manage community outreach and food delivery, assist isolated elderly individuals, and link displaced families to health services. Morley and Stenhouse (2021) reported that social workers showed incredible resilience and flexibility during the pandemic and faced increased exposure to risk and systemic under-resourcing, underscoring the need to better support the profession within institutions.

To sum up, social workers are unmistakably front-line health workers whose input is crucial to equitable, comprehensive, and person-centred health care. They are indispensable partners in securing improved health outcomes because they have the experience and desire to work in complex social systems and ensure social justice. To ensure this important profession can continue serving people most in need, governments, health systems, and academic institutions need to invest in the social work workforce by providing sufficient training, fair pay, and institutional support.

### REFERENCES

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