The Place of Medical Social Workers in the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benin City, Edo State. Nigeria

By

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the place of Medical Social Workers in the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benin City. The specific objectives were to examine ascertain how medical social workers intervene as advocates to resolves emergency problem and to investigate how medical social workers co-ordinate programmes, and rehabilitate patient in the study area. The study adopted theoretical framework on system theory. The population of this study includes Doctors, Nurses and Medical Social Workers. The remaining figures are for other medical and the non-medical personnel was estimated to be 500. Sample size of 100 respondents was adopted for the study. The respondents were chosen using the simple random sampling technique. The findings revealed that medical social worker plays a critical role in the areas of discharge planning and social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principle of social justice, human right, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. At the end of the work, useful recommendations were made, some of which are government should encourage medical social workers by way of providing them with in-service training. Enhance remuneration in their place of work as they are bound to face challenges of societal issues every day.

Keywords: Care, Health, Hospital, Medical, Settings

Background to the Study

Medical Social Work is one of the specialised areas of practice for Social Workers. Medical social workers held about 426,000 jobs in 2020. Only child, family and school social works held more jobs. Medical social workers jobs are projected to increase by 13 percent from 2019 to 2029 (USA Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2019). Social work unit is currently established in various health care settings, particularly hospitals. For example, 86 percent of general acute care hospital reported having social work services in the year 2020 (Barker, 2023). There is a growing recognition among medical professionals regarding the importance of various psychosocial issues and problems for the health of individuals. Social work is unique in health care settings in that it primarily focuses on psychosocial issues and problems.

The social worker is part of an integrated medical team based in an hospital and working with patients and their families and cases, and/or admitted to hospital. In addition to office and ward interviews, some home visits may be carried out. Their tasks are to asses, plan and support clients to cope with social, emotional, economic and environmental problems. The

main aims are to help clients maintain their independence and to live a normal a life as much as possible in the community. Social workers also work jointly with health workers on social matters that may affect present and future health issues (jones, 2022). To do this, they usually mobilize not only the personnel resources of the clients through casework or group work, but also draw upon domiciliary, day and residential services or financial aid available in the Department, through outside, statutory and voluntary agencies and sometimes through relatives, neighbours and volunteers in the community.

Medical social work addresses itself to illness brought about by, or related to social and environmental stresses that result in failures in social functioning and social relationships. The clientele of medical social workers are those whose needs are social and psychological and whose social functioning has been or is in danger of becoming impaired because of illness, disease or disability. Medical social work services disappeared entirely from almost all health care settings due to a lack of data demonstrating the efficacy of social work services and loss of funding for those services (Ogundipe, 2017)

Social work practice in health settings is markedly site specific; that is, social work activities and tasks may take quite different forms varying among others, for example, practice in an acute care or teaching hospital, a small General Hospital, a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), a community clinic, a medical group practice, a nursing home, a children's unit and so forth. There may be a sub-level of specificity between the type of sites and among sitting in the same category; for example, there may be distinctive differences between a General Hospital that is a teaching centre versus one that is not, between smaller and larger setting or urban and rural settings. Other health care professionals increasingly perceive some of the "traditional" social work roles and functions including psychosocial issues and problems of patients as part of their own domain (Barker, 2023). The population social workers served will vary depending on location and there may also be significant differences in social work functions and roles within the same category of health care organizations; for example, from one HMO to another. Portraj, (2021). Schram, (2021) stress the importance of understanding the particular organization and all its arrangements related to funding, accountability, procedures, the structure and relationships among and between various services in the organization and the means by which new services may be introduced or current programmes changed. Medical social worker(s) who appreciates the need to understand the structural and organizational arrangements of the setting will be more attuned to the patient's need(s) and, therefore, will be a better practitioner"

Statement of Research Problem

It is no accident that social work in health care settings is often characterized as "struggle" (Nisman, 2018). Having a place to stand within the field, with autonomy, are all matters that are never finally settled in the field, but rather are continuously subject to redefinition. The medical world is populated by experts and the emphasis is on rapid and accurate assessment and treatment. There is little time for a leisured approach to relationship building with clients, and even less for a lengthy diagnostic formulation as preparation for treatment. There is, rather, a premium on rapid decision making about and with people in crisis; thus, the questions for the social worker are always: What needs to be done? What can I do? How can I do it? With whom can I do it? In interdisciplinary settings, each professional may have

differing views of what the others do, or should do, in relation to each other. This is particularly true in health care settings that have been dominated by the medical profession. Historically, social work in health care has been subordinate to the medical profession and thus the physicians' view of the patient has taken precedence. The primary difference between a social work perspective of health care and the medical model is that the latter views health, in negative terms, as the absence of disease. The medical profession focuses on the bio-medical aspects of care and is less interested in the social impact of health. One consequence of this bio-medical focus is that there has been, in part, an emphasis in social work on helping people adapt to the demands of illness and hospitalization. Increasingly Medical Social Workers have experienced role overlap and conflict with other medical professionals. Better understanding of factors that influence Medical Social Work roles and contribute to role overlap and conflict could provide guidelines to address this role confusion and conflict. Finally, in recent years, the emphasis on developing autonomous social work practice in health care settings has led several literatures to suggest that the time has arrive for social workers to expand their roles and promote a bio-psycho-social approach to health care practice (Nisman, 2018).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study was to examine the place of medical social workers in the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benin City, Edo State Nigeria the specific objectives were to:

1. ascertain how medical social workers intervene as advocates to resolves emergency problem in University of Benin teaching hospital (UBTH). Benin City
2. investigate how medical social workers co-ordinate and rehabilitate patients in the study area.

Literature Review

Medical social workers are concern with both in-patient's and out-patient within and without the hospital. 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, andethical dilemmas for individuals, families, and health care providers. These psychosocial implications of health care are what social workers are trained to address. Currently, health care social workers provide services across the continuum of care and in various settings. Social workers are present in public health, acute, and chronic care settings providing a range of services including health education, crisis intervention, supportive counseling, and case management. In response to critical incidents that are both global and national, health care social workers are increasingly trained to provide interventions to prepare for and respond to traumatic events and disasters (Sverker, 2020). The health care system in Nigeria is complex and multidisciplinary in nature, and may include a network of services such as diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, health maintenance, and prevention provided to individuals of all ages and with a range of needs. Multiple sources of financing, ranging from Medicare and Medicaid to private insurance, provide further challenges. Many consumers lack health insurance or have inadequate coverage, which causes financial stress on consumers and providers. Professional social workers are well equipped to practice in the health care field, because of their broad perspective on the range of physical, emotional, and environmental factors that have an effect on the well-being of individuals and communities. These standards are developed to meet the needs of social workers in multiple

health care practice settings and to help the public understand the role of the professional social worker (Okoye, 2018).

The social worker can be viewed as an advocate on behalf of the poor or socially excluded (Jones, 2022). The advocacy role can also be played for individuals or groups such as families or community and in some respect the advocacy role can also be associated with community work. The social worker in this role can give, assist or support individuals or groups by giving voice or assisting them to give their own voice to their wishes, needs and aspiration (Gay, 2019). The advocacy role still privileges the notion of a close relationship between client/services user and social worker. They conduct assessment of patient's social, emotional, interpersonal and socio-economic issues. They work to enhance patient and families communication with the medical team members to enable patient to be active partners in their own care. Depending upon the specialty unit, social workers are often involved in illness, education and counseling. In all areas, they are pivotal to the aftercare planning process to facilitate the careful transition back to family and community.

Jordan (2021) any attempt to explore the role and function of the social worker must of necessity seek to answer or at the very least address one basic question, what is social work. Social work is a practice based profession and an academic discipline that promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principle of social justice, human right, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (Carlton, 2018).

Social worker should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing. This means:

1. Respecting the right to self-determination: social workers should respect and promote people's right to make their own choices and decisions irrespective of their value and life choice. Provided this does not threaten the right and legitimate interest of others.
2. Promoting the right to participation: social workers should promote the full involvement and participation of people using their services in way that enable them to be empowered in all aspects of decision and actions affecting their lives.
3. Training each person as a whole: social workers should be concerned with the whole person, within the family, community and societal and natural environments, and should seek to recognize all aspects of a person's life.
4. Identifying and developing strength: social workers should focus on the strength of all individuals, groups and communities and thus promote their empowerment.

Theoretical Framework: System theory

System theory was developed by biologist Ludwig von bertalanffy in the 1930s to simplify world complexity to human mind and make it more understandable (Selltiz, 2012). The system theory is used to understand how things around us work for example the hospital is a system with inputs, processes and outputs. The hospital itself is a component of a larger system, health care system, banking system, educational system, judicial system and other systems comprise the socio-economic-political system within which we live.

The system theory is used to organize and demonstrate complex interactions between systems using a theoretical base. Concepts used in this model are interdependence, synergy, environment and homeostasis. Medical professionals use concepts of micro (individual), mezzo (family), and macro (community) level interaction to assess how illness affects the individual and other interrelated systems.

System theory is used to clearly and concisely understand health care structures, processes and outcomes, processes and their interactions within a health care system. System theory can be used as a framework to describe the components of systems and the relationship between these components, the boundaries of the system, the goals of the system, and the ability to change and adapt in response to internal and external forces. Systems theory help us understand how health care organizations and systems behave and it allows us to clearly assess, visualize, analyze and understand the structure, processes, and feedback loops that make up the organization. This correct and clear understanding as a system is a necessity to be able to manage organization effectively and efficiently and to achieve organization's goals.

Research Methodology

Survey research design is used in this study. The survey research design is an efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents and the ability to use statistical techniques to determine statistical significance (Denscombe, 2019). This research strategy is considered necessary because of its ability to view comprehensively and in detail the major questions raised in the study. The total population of this study is health workers in University of Benin teaching hospital which include Doctors, Nurses and Medical Social Workers. The remaining figures are for other medical and the non-medical personnel. For the purpose of this study our focused on the Doctors and Nurses because these are the two perceived Professionals in the hospital environment that are constantly in role conflict with Medical Social Workers. The estimated of the study was 500.

Taro Yamane method of sample size determination was used

n= N/ (1+N (e) 2)

Where: n= signifies the sample size

N = this is the estimated total population under study

Sample size = N/ (1+N (e) 2)

$$n = \frac{500}{(1+500(0.05)\ 2)}$$

Sample size = 100

Two methods of data collection which are primary source and secondary source were used to collect data. The primary sources were the use of questionnaires, while the secondary sources include textbooks, internet, journals, published and unpublished articles and government publications.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
AGE	20- 30years	17	17.0
	31-40	42	42.0
	41-50 years	40	40.0
	51-60 years	1	1.0
	Total	**100**	**100**
MARITAL STATUS	Married	61	61.0
	Single	39	39.0
	Total	**100**	**100**
RELIGION	Christianity	82	82.0
	Muslim	9	9.0
	African traditional belief	5	5.0
	Others	4	4.0
	Total	**100**	**100**
EDUCATION LEVEL	Primary	6	6%
	Secondary	27	27%
	Highest Education	66	66%
	Others	1	1%
	Total	**100**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2024.

From table .1 above, the result shows the age of the respondents. The result therefore revealed that respondents who were 20-30 years accounted for 17% of the population, respondents who were 31-40 years accounted for 42% of the respondents, who were 41-50 year accounted for 40% of the population, who were 51-60 years accounted for 1% of the population. This shows that the respondents who were 31-40 years was the highest in the population. The result shows the Marital Status of the respondents. The result therefore revealed that there were more Married than Single, as Single accounted for 39% of the population while married accounted for 61% of the population.

The result shows the religion of the respondents. 82% of the respondents were Christians, while 9% of the respondents belonged to Islam, African traditional belief accounted for 5% and 4% to any other religion. In regard to educational background. The result therefore revealed that respondents who were primary school leaving certificate accounted for 6% of the population, respondents who had secondary school certificate accounted for 27% of the population, respondents who were tertiary school certificate accounted for 66% of the population, respondents who were other level accounted for 1% of the population.

Table 2: Ascertain how medical social workers intervene as advocates to resolves emergency problem in University of Benin Teaching Hospital

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Medical Social workers focus on the resolution of people's problems through counseling	2.72	1.63	Agreed
2	Medical Social workers focus on the resolution of people's problems through follow up	3.41	1.85	Agreed
3	Medical Social workers focus on the resolution of people's problems through consultation	3.52	1.88	Agreed
4	Medical Social workers focus on the resolution of people's problems through collaboration with a team	3.63	1.91	Agreed
	Grand Mean		**3.32**	

Data presented in Table 2 revealed that respondents agreed on all the items presented at a mean score of 2.72, 3.41, 3.52 and 3.63 respectively. The grand mean of 3.32 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies that medical social workers intervene as advocates to resolves emergency problem through counseling, through follow up, through consultation and through collaboration with a team.

Table 3: Investigate how medical social workers co-ordinate and rehabilitate patient in the study area

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	The coordination of patient discharge planning and continuity of care planning is a major function of medical social workers	3.68	1.92	Agreed
2	Medical social workers help to improve patient satisfaction by providing emotional support	3.15	1.77	Agreed
3	Medical social workers are adept at helping patients and families understand the illness and treatment options, as well as consequences of various treatment or treatment refusal	2.77	1.66	Agreed
4	Medical social worker help develop and plan the rehabilitation programme	3.95	1.99	Agreed
	Grand Mean		**3.39**	

Data presented in Table 3 revealed that respondents agreed on all the items presented at a mean score of 3.68, 3.15, 2.77 and 3.95 respectively. The grand mean of 3.39 is above the criterion mean score of 2.50 which implies medical social worker help to improve patient satisfaction by providing emotional support, understanding the illness and treatment option and also plan rehabilitation programme.

Discussion of Findings

This section gives detailed explanation on the various findings discovered from the research question. Table 1 shows the Roles of Medical Social Workers in UBTH. It was supported by the work of Miller, 2017. The medical social worker plays a critical role in the areas of discharge planning. it is the medical social workers responsibility to develop a discharge plan that will meet the patients' needs and allow the patient to leave the hospital in a timely manner so as to prevent delay in discharge that could cost the hospital thousands of dollars per day in lost revenues from third-party payers and also Medical social workers are concern with both in-patient's and out-patient within and without the hospital.

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. Currently, health care social workers provide services across the continuum of care and in various settings. Social workers are present in public health, acute, and chronic care settings providing a range of services including health education, crisis intervention, supportive counseling, and case management. In response to critical incidents that are both global and national, health care social workers are increasingly trained to provide interventions to prepare for and respond to traumatic events and disasters (Sverker, 2020).

The findings confirmed in the findings of (Jones, 2022). The advocacy role can also be played for individuals or groups such as families or community and in some respect the advocacy role can also be associated with community work. The social worker in this role can give, assist or support individuals or groups by giving voice or assisting them to give their own voice to their wishes, needs and aspiration (Gay, 2019). The advocacy role still privileges the notion of a close relationship between client/services user and social worker. They conduct assessment of patient's social, emotional, interpersonal and socio-economic issues. They work to enhance patient and family's communication with the medical team members to enable patient to be active partners in their own care. Depending upon the specialty unit, social workers are often involved in illness, education and counseling. In all areas, they are pivotal to the aftercare planning process to facilitate the careful transition back to family and community. Jordan (2021) any attempt to explore the role and function of the social worker must of necessity seek to answer or at the very least address one basic question, what is social work. Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principle of social justice, human right, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (Carlton, 2018).

The objective on the investigation of how medical social workers co-ordinate and rehabilitate patients in the study area. This is accordance with Gibelman (2020). Medical social workers often deal with highly complex cases involving patients who come into the hospital with multiple psychosocial issues, all of which require assessment and treatment. It is not uncommon for medical social workers to treat case involving homelessness, chronic unemployment, lack of income, lack of health insurance coverage, history of incarceration,

and substance abuse problems, any of these problems, separately and together, can impede time discharge.

Conclusion

The study was geared towards ensuring the roles of a medical social worker in the hospital. For academic excellence, and also to use it, attempts were made to fully outline the various the various roles of a medical social worker in the hospital and also to use it to make a case before the government to formulate policy that will mandate all hospitals to employ social workers, whether government or private hospital. This explains why government should make effort to safeguard social workers in various field in the country. It has been found out that social worker has a long enduring effect on the society at large. It is therefore imperative that social workers should be safeguarded in any way humanly possible.

Contrary to expectation, the importance of social worker has been undermined. The various bodies instituted for the purpose of checking social workers with a view to creating stability have seemingly relinquished their functions. The government has also agreed that social workers should be treated with care. Social workers should be treated with respect so as to attain growth and stability in social work practices. Social workers must be recognized by all arms of government; federal, state and local govt. to take full charge of their position, in ministry and local government social welfare must be professional social workers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be social welfare department in all federal and state parastatals. Because, the social work mission is to enable all people to develop their full potentials.
2. The government should encourage all social workers by way of providing them with in-service training

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