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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER'S INTERVENTION IN PATIENT'S POST- DIAGNOSIS PERIOD.

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#### Abstract

No doubt India is one of the fastest developing countries in the world but still it has a long way to go. Here in India more than 22% of the population are living below poverty line (according to data released by Planning Commission in 2013) and this percent of population does not have an access to all the facilities like education, health, etc. There is deprivation of food, health facilities, education etc.

Social workers working in medical settings often find that people do not have access to medical facilities. They don't have the exact knowledge of facilities available within the existing setting. There is a gap of communication which tends to widen the distance between patients and the available facilities from which they can be immensely benefitted. Medical social worker makes an effort to fill in that gap by having one on one conversation with the patient and the family so that they have an access to all the facilities and are benefitted by them and help them to regress their influenced concerns. This paper hearkens the role of medical social workers in assisting such patients and their families to face and handle the post diagnosis period in a better way.

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#### Introduction:-

Medical condition or illness is not only an onslaught on physical health of patient but it also affects social, psychological, emotional and financial well being of patients as well as their families. It is a condition one never wants to be in but if one happens to be one wants to come out of it as quickly as possible because not everyone is capable of handling such situations. In medical settings, medical social workers may come across many people who need help and assistance to face such situations and come out of them with flying colors. There is need of professional help for such patients and that professional help is offered by medical social workers. Medical social workers offer timely assistance and support to such patients so that they are not shattered by the status-quo and make an effort to redeem themselves up to face the situation and get back into their society. Medical social work helps in assisting the patients and their families to face and handle the post diagnosis period in a better way. Intervention may vary from offering counseling or psychotherapy to patients and their families in need of psychological help to strengthen their emotional, social, medical and financial support by proper resource mobilization.

There are times in a patient's life when (s) he feels that(s) he is not capable of coping with a particular situation i.e., post diagnosis period. He/she feels that the whole situation is taking a toll on him or her. The whole situation appears very brow- beating to him or her. There are patients who believe that it is a formidable task to come out of this particular situation. The situation which is going to inflict them in every way i.e., physically, financially,

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emotionally, socially, etc and in a process they tend to botch up things and thus find it miserable to come out of the situation or handle the entire situation in a better way. To deal with such clients and assist them to come out of this quagmire, medical social workers have to do their best. In such situations, a pro-active social worker offers psycho-social, emotional and financial support to the patient and family. Medical social worker first tries to get all the possible relevant information from the patient and his or her family and then devise a plan to deal with it. One of the important techniques and tools in the hands of medical social worker is the technique of counseling which is used to assist the clients to deal with a specific situation. It is a technique where we have a one on one directed interaction with patient and then devise a plan to resolve the issue. It has to be understood that the patients suffering from diseases do struggle more with psychological issues. These patients have a propensity to develop anxiety and even depression. Non – physical treatment side-effects such as anger, anxiety, depression etc along with the physical treatment side effects such as nausea, hair loss, loss of control are often a cause of concern for these patients. Fear of death, fear of interruption of life plans, fear of change in body image and self-esteem are very common in these patients. Counseling helps to keep these influenced fears and anxieties at bay from patients. To cater these psychological issues, it needs to be understood that these issues do not emerge out of a vacuum. There is a history or reason behind it and before devising any plan that reason or history needs to be known and as far as medical social work is concerned that reason could be possibly illness, disease, trauma, disability etc.

Medical social worker encourages patient and the family to express both positive and negative thoughts about the disease. If a medical social worker finds that it is the patient himself or herself that is coming in way of handling the situation in a better way then he or she first tries to cater his or her personal needs. For example, if a patient is diagnosed with some life threatening disease say cancer it becomes very difficult for him or her to first accept the fact that he or she is suffering from this fatal disease and then she/he may have to live with this disease for the rest of life. The patient tends to envisage every associated aspect particularly the negative ones of it i.e., patient is left with too little time to be with the family, the repercussions family may have to face after the patient's departure from this world (particularly when the patient is lone bread earner of the family), patient is more concerned about the sustenance of family than his or her own health. Medical social worker asks about the most important concerns of the patient with respect to their family so that he/she can offer appropriate psychological assistance and help the patient to overcome his or her psychological sufferings and struggles.

While offering assistance to patients, medical social worker encounters patients who are more concerned with the social problems or issues they may have to face after the diagnosis of disease. For example, during treatment of disease, cancer patients may need to undergo some surgery and may have to lose one of the body organs which may cause a change in their physical appearance or image. The patient feels deformity or change in physical appearance or image may bring some kind of ignominy and a sense of low-self esteem with it. They may develop a fear of rejection and presume that the society as a whole will not accept them with their disease. So, they think of quitting the treatment. They believe that they will not be able to face the society any more. They may also feel shy and grossly disrespectful about themselves and may want to run away from the whole situation. Secondly, some diseases can take a toll on patient physically than anything else. Patients may not be physically as good as they used to be in their usual state of health. They may not be able to carry out their routine work. They may have to depend on other family members for their usual and routine tasks. These things can enrage them and lead them to some kind of anxiety. Here, what a social worker does is that she/he tries to calm down the patient by asserting that whatever the situation patient is facing may be transient and soon he/ she will be out of it and will be able to carry out most of the work independently and may need not to depend on others for trivial things. Medical social worker helps patient to vent out his/her thoughts about the disease. She gives an opportunity for catharsis of emotions to the patient and helps them to release their emotional sufferings. Besides, a medical social worker also reflects on the fact that there is possibly no mistake of theirs if they have got a particular disease. There is hardly much they can do about it. They have no or very less or minimal control over their disease or illness. Medical social worker encourages a patient to gear himself or herself up to face the whole situation with a positive attitude but it is to be noted here that the social worker needs to be wary of giving false hopes. Social worker needs to reflect the positive aspects of the entire situation and this positivity needs to be transferred to the patient. It should be reiterated that for a patient, it must be the health and family that must be on top of the priority list and not anything else.

Sometimes being completely unaware about the disease can also be very discomfiting for patient and his/her family, so giving timely information is also important. Social worker can update patient and his family by giving some important information without trying to appear as a quack or she/he can ask a doctor to take some time out and give an update to the patient and his family about the disease. It helps to prepare the patient and family emotionally and

psychologically for the future course of action. It also helps them to understand what is needed to be done and how much is needed to be done because there are families who repudiate the fact that there are certain medical conditions for which certain treatment protocols need to be followed. Despite repetitive assurances given by the treating team, they fail to understand that if a treating team assures them that there is no need of any further medical intervention after a certain point of time, this definitely does not mean that the treating team is casting them down for any further action it just means that any action done in redundancy is going to be besetting for the patient as well as for the family.

It has also been observed that even after the complete recuperation of patient from disease, the family tend to kind of incarcerate the patient. The family does not allow the patient to carry out his/her routine work. They intentionally or unintentionally make the patient dependent on them for minor things which he/she otherwise could do very easily himself or herself. Here, the social worker makes a family realize that confining patient to four walls and not letting them to live their lives as normal persons is not going to help the patient in any way. In fact, it can become very annoying for the patient. Even after the complete recovery from disease, patient feels dejected and disappointed because he feels that he/she has become a liability for the family. So what a social worker does is that he/she makes the family understand that by doing this they are doing no good to the patient. In fact, they as a family are adding to his her sufferings. They need to realize that allowing patient to live his/ her life and letting them to do their routine work help to normalize the things and contributing actively in the routine work helps them to release and relieve their mental stress and associated anxieties.

There are patients and families who are capable enough of handling the social and psychological pressures better but what holds them back is the lack of finance. Patients belonging to modest financial background are always concerned about the money they may need to treat the disease. They don't have access to financial facilities to treat their disease. They don't have money to pay for medicines. This deprivation of money obscures the chances of patient to remain positive and hopeful throughout the disease. The feeling of hopelessness can be devastating in such situations because it has been observed that stronger you are mentally or the stronger your will power is the better you will be able to fight against the disease. Here the medical social worker offers the financial assistance or support to patients by linking them with the organizations working for such patients to treat their disease and by doing so she /he helps the patient and the family to keep the capability of handling the pressure intact.

When a client is diagnosed with a disease be it some life – threatening disease or not so serious one, the efficacy of prescribed treatment depends on how the client is going to respond to it not only physically but mentally as well. There are clients whose body appears to be fit for treatment but the problem lies in their acceptance of treatment. They are not mentally prepared to go through the whole treatment procedure. They have a belief that since it is given by God it will be controlled by the God himself only and they don't need any medical intervention. Frequent hospital visits for investigations, check- ups, etc go against their likings. Generally, hospital visits act as stressor for them. Here, the technique of counseling used by medical social workers help to keep patient and the family motivated to not only to continue the treatment but also complete the prescribed treatment for patient's well being. They assist in sustaining that level of motivation.

When a client is hit by some life threatening or serious disease, it usually takes some time to get better or to be normal. During the course of treatment, patient needs to cooperate and show some kind of patience in bearing the possible treatment side effects. But there are patients who tend to sulk if they don't get the desired results or results as per their wishes. So, the medical social worker makes them understand that there is nothing like magical treatment. Every treatment takes its time to manifest its results, therefore medical social worker keeps on highlighting the benefits of treatment and also underscores the importance and advantages of results, it may ensue. Medical social worker helps the patient to feel comfortable about the whole existing situation and may also plan a referral for psychiatric help in case she or he feels that the patient needs one. So being a social worker in medical settings, one must acknowledge the fact that there are clients who are affected by some personal and environmental factors and as a medical social worker you just cannot ignore them. They encourage clients to face the situation in a better way by responding to those concerns.

### **Conclusion:-**

Medical social work offers valuable contribution in ameliorating health services by offering different services. Medical social worker offers services not only to patients but they also work with their families. They engage with patients and families to identify and address barriers to wellness. The aim of medical social work is to lessen their

sufferings and struggles emerged out of illness by providing timely services to meet their psychological, social, emotional and financial needs. The aim is to change the perspective of patients and their families look for a particular situation. It prepares them for every possibility they may encounter in due course of time. Medical social work has been working in this direction for very long and will surely continue to work in the same direction for the human well being of people.

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