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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### AN OVERVIEW OF MEDICAL SOCIAL WORK.

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#### Abstract

Social work is a vast branch of knowledge that surrounds a large number of therapeutic treatments and methodologies. Medical social work a broader field of social work also known as hospital social work helps the patient to travel the world of medical care. Medical social worker also known as case worker plays a very real role in the rehabilitation and counseling of patients. This paper inspects the roles played by the medical social worker in hospital settings. The challenges faced by the medical social workers in hospitals have also been given special importance. This paper also clearly defines the duties and obligations of medical social worker for serving the patients in a beneficial way.

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#### Introduction:-

##### Introduction To Social Work:-

Social work is a discipline in which a professional social worker by using professional skills helps his client be it an individual, group of individuals or a community to solve the problems by making optimum utilization of the available resources. It aims to improve the quality of life by making the client self-reliant so that the client(s) can solve their problems in future independently. While offering assistance to his client, a social worker can make use of different techniques such as counselling, advocacy, crisis intervention, social action etc.

Further, there are different methods of social work. These are casework, group work, community organization, social administration, social action and social work research. Depending upon the situation, social worker can make use one of these particular methods but no matter which particular method a social worker applies, the focus should also remain on the individual growth which definitely helps in the growth of a society as whole.

##### Medical Social Work:-

Social work is no more limited to the concept of a Non- Government Organization helping a client in need of resolving social or may be some psychological problems. It has gone well beyond this concept and has fortified its position by spreading its tentacles almost in every field for example: education, health, business or commercial set up etc. Social workers working in different settings are known by different names for example; medical social worker in health sector, educational social worker in educational institutions, counsellor etc .

Medical social work is one of the substantial sub-disciplines of social work. The origin of medical social work goes back to early nineteenth century, 1905 to be precise, when social work was extended to clinics, home care agencies and other hospitals.

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The practicality of medical social work is witnessed in health setting where social workers known as Medical Social Workers are engaged and involved in almost every step. When a client (patient) visits the hospital, the work of a medical social worker begins right from there. The role of medical social worker encases everything that is, right from navigating the client, counseling the client and his family to cope with the disease to discharging the client from hospital. There is also a close nexus between doctors and medical social workers. A medical social worker can assist the doctor in catering the patient's needs in a better way by preparing a brief case history or by acting as a mediator between the doctor and his patient by bridging the gap between two and thus facilitating and improving the overall health care services.

#### **Role Of Medical Social Worker:-**

Social worker plays a significant role in health set-up. Medical social worker is endowed with some specific professional skills which enables him to play a role of an anchor alongwith medical and para- medical staff in hospital setting. The first and foremost job of a medical social worker is to create an ambience conducive to client where he/she can express his sufferings and associated psycho-social problems freely. Secondly, to break the news to a client and his family is one of the most important tasks of medical social worker. When a client visits the hospital he needs to be told everything about his condition and in case he is suffering from some serious or fatal disease the task becomes even more difficult. The medical social worker tries to assuage his sufferings by responding to his each and every query. There is every possibility that the client who is being told about his life threatening disease may land in depression. Such clients who are in distress need to be dealt deftly and may be helped a lot by medical social worker by assuring all possible emotional and psychological support. Such patients have a tendency to become pessimistic about life and it is the duty of medical social worker to transform this pessimism into optimistic attitude by proper counseling so that the patient and his family don't lose hope and show equal participation by following the patient protocol. In addition to this, medical social workers also offer group counseling where a small group of patients meet regularly and interact and discuss their problems and issues with each other.

Medical social worker also helps to educate the client and his family about the disease by giving clear exposition in simple and naïve language. He tries to elucidate by giving precise information about treatment options, side effects of treatment, use of medication, investigations that might be advised by the doctor, importance of regular follow up visits etc. His job is to make things simple to the client which otherwise appears very elusive.

Medical social worker acts as a facilitator as well who links the client with the organization that can cater his needs. There are many clients who need assistance other than social and psychological assistance. These clients may need financial assistance, assistance in kind (drugs or surgical instruments etc.). Also, medical social worker ardently speaks about the available welfare schemes and other provisions so that the entreating patients are benefitted. In case there is some urgency, a medical social worker can also plan on spot fund-raising so that there is no one who gets unnoticed and is deprived of the possible help.

Medical social worker also bridges the gap between doctors and patients. Sometimes, patient hesitate to divulge important information about their disease to doctor. This could prove detrimental for the patient in long run. So, it is the medical social worker to whom patient feel easy to talk to and medical social worker underscores all the important information before doctor so that it helps him to make a better and suitable management plan for the patient.

Lastly, Medical social worker also helps in maintaining the patient data and this may help the administration in framing up different policies and plans to improve the overall medical infrastructure and ameliorate the patient care services.

#### **Challenges To Medical Social Worker In Hospitals:-**

Social work is one of those disciplines which is relatively new in origin. Social workers may face a number of challenges when they go in field. This is generally because many people are not well acquainted with this discipline. They often misconstrue it. They believe that it is just another name for social service. It becomes a challenge for social worker to make people understand the difference between the two, that is, social work and social service. Social work is a professional discipline carried out by professionals for the assistance of different clients whereas social service can be carried out by any person who wishes or desires to help the people in need. For social work, it

is mandatory for a person to acquire a professional degree (M.S.W) whereas no such professional degree is required for social service.

Another challenge that medical social workers may encounter in field is that there are many who believe that the job profile of social worker encompass everything. They believe that they are supposed to do any kind of job and thus disparage their presence. A line needs to be drawn to emphasize what a professional medical social worker actually does. His / her work must not be mystified with a mere cog who just makes a small contribution in improving the health care system. He / she plays a significant subsidiary role and if you want a stronger base for overall health care system medical social workers must be given proper opportunities to mark their contribution and this contribution needs to be given utter acknowledgement.

When a client approaches the medical social worker for assistance, sometimes, he himself feels befogged due to lack of knowledge and finds it difficult to answer his queries. So, there should be proper induction training programmes for medical social workers so that they become well versed with the medical knowledge and are able to answer every possible question posed by their clients.

Also, there are many provisions available in every state for the benefit of deprived clients (patients). The availability of these provisions give them some sort of respite from the fact they at least might complete their treatment and will not have to leave their treatment mid-way due to financial constraints. Here, the challenge for medical social worker is to ensure that the help reaches to all deserving clients and needs to analyze carefully that no one other than the real beneficiaries get the advantage of available schemes and provisions. Because, what happens when clients get to know about these available schemes they believe that every client is eligible and can avail the benefits irrespective of the nature of disease one is suffering from or whether he/she fulfills other eligibility criterion to avail the benefits. It becomes the duty of medical social worker to overhaul the whole process and ensure that only the right and deserving client is benefitted.

A social worker working in health centres especially in government health centres may often face the challenge of working with the very limited available resources. Due to limited available resources, at times, it becomes difficult for social worker to explain why he/she cannot provide assistance to all the clients who seek help. Although, he may refer the client to the concerned organization for help but it is not easy for him to convince the client that due to unavailability of resources the client may have to seek the services of some other organization. This is because the clients generally expect that they might get all the help under one roof and may not need to go anywhere else for the help. Thus it is a challenge for medical social worker to satisfy his client's needs especially one which he himself cannot satisfy and make sure that his client's may not feel disgruntled and unnoticed.

Thus, medical social work is a profession where a medical social worker may face a number of challenges. It is a profession which demands from social worker to play a number of different roles at one particular time. For example, a medical social worker has to play a role of a counsellor for a client not able to cope with the stressful situation. Similarly, he has to play a role of an educator who educates the client and his associate about the nature of disease and tries to answer their questions. Also, medical social worker has to play a role of a facilitator who links his client with different agencies for assistance and even plays the role of a mediator to bridge the gap between the doctor and his patient.

A medical social worker has to overcome all the challenges deftly that may come in his way to prove beneficial. He has to propound different viable solutions to client's issues and make medical social work more effective and promulgate it in health care.

### **Conclusion:-**

Medical social work, one of the sub-disciplines of social work improves the efficacy of overall health care system. It helps to achieve the desired set of goals in the given time. In fact, it has become indispensable in most of the health care centres worldwide. This article is a framework which shapes the concept of medical social work and clears the associated misinterpretations. It also underscores the importance of medical social work in ameliorating the quality of life of clients which is otherwise considered as worthless and sulking and it also highlights the steps needed to be taken to ratify its existence.

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