Defining the Role of the Social Worker on the Interdisciplinary Team and Educating the Team about Unique Social Work Skills

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Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.
Palliative care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms

- affirms life and regards dying as a normal process;
- intends neither to hasten or postpone death;
- integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care;
- offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death;
Palliative Care (Cont.)

- Clinical offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient’s illness and in their own bereavement;

- uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counseling, if indicated;

- will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness;

- is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing symptoms.

- WHO Definition of Palliative Care
Interdisciplinary Team

Optimum model in Palliative Care

Ideally cares for the whole person and family by addressing multiple needs of patient and family

Team members work together to provide excellent care to patients and families

Team members support each other in this difficult work
Interdisciplinary Team (cont)

- Complex care which is best served by multiple care team members, each with a defined role

- Overlap of roles occurs
Challenges to teamwork

- Lack of time to adequately process cases
- Size of team can affect good communication
- Lack of role definition can cause confusion
- Lack of knowledge of professionals competencies can lead to lack of communication and distrust as well as “turf wars”
Challenges to Effective Interdisciplinary Care (cont.)

- Hierarchical structure
- Poor definition of authority
- Systems issues
- Secrets, rumors, mistrust
Medical Model
Physical needs are met by MDs and RNs but psychosocial needs are privileged by all team members (O’Connor and Fisher)

Lack of clear role definitions can negatively impact care of patient and family

Can be frustrating for social workers

Important to work collaboratively but also to feel empowered by confidence in unique skill set
Cowles and Lefkowitz found MDs and RNs perceived role of referrals and connecting with community resources to be job of social worker alone but role of providing emotional or clinical intervention to be shared with members of interdisciplinary team.

Finding of this study (O’Connor and Fisher) “blurring of role boundaries and the provision of psychosocial care was perceived as positive by non specialist psychosocial team members and as unsatisfactory, frustrating and potentially harmful by specialist psychosocial team members.”
Definition of Palliative Care Social Work Skill Sets

- NASW

- CAPC

- National Center for Gerontological education in Social Work

- NASW Advanced Practice Specialty Credentials in Hospice and Palliative Care
Social Work Role

- Social Work values, knowledge, and skills are inherently consistent with the principles of palliative care: client self-determination, the biopsychosocial/spiritual perspective, family and social systems, cultural competence, and promotion of social justice are a natural fit in the palliative care context. With their psychosocial training, social workers have comprehensive skills, not only as practitioners, but as educators, researchers, and policy makers as well. Social workers are fundamentally trained to practice from a “person in his or her environment” perspective.
Unique Role of Social Work Training

- Knowledge of family systems
- Group skills
- Knowledge of trauma, suicide
- Person in environment-cultural, ethnic family issues
Additional areas of expertise in the Palliative Care setting

- Advance Care Planning
- Bioethics
- Grief and bereavement
- Group facilitation
- Team dynamics

- Education
- Research
Social Work Role in a community based hospital

- Setting: Limited staffing and increasing need for services can lead to permeable roles among team members

- Re-defining role of palliative care social worker for myself and team…It’s a process.

- Designing a clinical intervention
  - Seek Support: mentoring program and professional affiliations
  - Providing education on role
Social Work Role in academic medical center

- Brief history of team
- Development of bereavement program
- Bioethics
- Education
- Palliative Care Champion program
Teaching the Team

*Communication Seminars*
Monthly seminars for interdisciplinary team on “communication” issues

Working with Challenging Families

Educating Families on Talking to Children About Death

How to Talk to Patients about Dying
Interprofessional Education

Educational sessions arranged for each team member to educate the interdisciplinary team on aspects of their profession including education, credentialing, and specific skill set.
Hospital wide Education

- Palliative Care Social Work Champion Program
- Memorial Service
- Hospital wide bereavement services
References


References

