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## **The Role of Social Workers**

### **How Social Workers Can Help You**

Social Workers help people maintain the highest possible level of physical and emotional wellness through direct counseling. They can help people:

- Identify their concerns,
- Consider effective solutions, and
- Find reliable resources that can help.

Social Workers can be consulted for many reasons including:

- Inadequate housing,
- Unemployment,
- Lack of job skills,
- Financial distress,
- Serious illness or disability,
- Substance abuse,
- Antisocial behavior, or
- Domestic conflicts, including those involving child or spousal abuse.

Social Workers typically consult and counsel clients and coordinate the appropriate services. Frequently, they refer clients to specialists in services such as debt counseling, childcare, or elder care, public assistance, or alcohol or drug rehabilitation. They then follow through to make sure the services meet the client's needs and that the client is making the best use of the services. Social workers may also review eligibility requirements, assist in filling out forms and applications, visit clients regularly, and offer support during crises.

Social Workers practice in a variety of settings, including Family Services Agencies, Home Health Care Agencies, Community Mental Health Centers, private practice, Child Welfare, Schools, Hospitals, Businesses, Nursing Homes, Hospice, Courts, Prisons, and public and private agencies. They work closely with individuals and

families, as well as in public policy, administration, research, community organizing, and advocacy.

## **Training and Credentials**

Social Workers have a degree in Social Work from a college or university program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The undergraduate degree is the Bachelor of Social Work (BSW). Graduate degrees include the Master of Social Work (MSW) and the Doctorate in Social Work (DSW) or PhD.

In Virginia, a **Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)** has a Master of Social Work degree, two years post-graduate direct clinical social work experience, and has successfully completed a clinical examination administered of the [Association of Social Work Boards](#) (ASWB), the state regulatory board of social work.

A **Licensed Social Worker (LSW)** has either a Master or a Bachelor of Social Work, anywhere from 0-2 years post-graduate supervised experience, and has passed a basic examination required by ASWB.

Most Social Workers specialize in an area of practice. These specializations include, clinical services, child welfare or family services, child or adult protective services, mental health, health care, education, criminal justice, occupational, gerontology, administrators, planners, and policy makers. Gerontological Social Workers specialize in services to the elderly. They may coordinate support groups for family caregivers, or for the adult children of aging parents. Gerontological social workers also advise elderly people or family members about the choices in such areas as housing, transportation, and long-term care; they also coordinate and monitor services. It's not uncommon that Geriatric Care Managers are Social Workers by training.

## **Preparing for a Meeting with a Social Worker**

A Social Worker looks at all parts of an individual's situation, including mental, physical, psychological, spiritual, and emotional. In order to find the best resource and help identify all possible solutions to the presenting problem, the Social Worker needs a complete understanding of the issue. Prepare yourself for questions about your situation.

Many times a meeting with a Social Worker results because of a problem or situation at home or at work. Talking about personal events in your life can be challenging, but remember, health professionals are there to help you in a caring and confidential setting. In order to help you they will need your input and trust as much as you need theirs.

Confidentiality and self-determination are integral to the education and training of Social Workers. Social work, as a profession places the highest value on treating information about people with the utmost privacy. Additionally, Social Workers do not make decisions for people, but facilitate healthy, informed decision-making by individuals themselves. By being completely open and honest with a Social Worker, you will gain the most from the Social Worker's knowledge and skills.

### **Costs and Coverage**

Medical social services offered as a part of a home health agency are covered under Medicare's Home Health Care Coverage, Medical Social Services. Medicare will cover medical social service care for as long as you are eligible and your doctor says you are in need of this care. If the home care provider offering medical social services accepts Medicare assignment, the agency will accept the Medicare predetermined payment. At agencies that don't accept Medicare assignment, you will pay out-of-pocket for services.

In an outpatient setting, Medicare will cover social services based on a fee schedule. For agencies that don't accept Medicare assignment, you will pay out-of-pocket for services. Many community non-profit agencies offer affordable social services for those not eligible for Medicare.

### **Consumer Tips**

Many social service agencies have a 24-hour crisis number that can be called in case of an emergency.

When you call an agency or individual for social work services be sure to:

- Interview the Social Worker who will work with you,
- Ask if the agency is Medicare-approved,
- Explain your problem, your concerns, and your needs,
- Make sure you understand the answers to your questions,

- Find out if there is an appeal process if you are unhappy with decisions regarding eligibility, costs, or coverage, and
- Ask the Social Worker to follow up with you to make sure you are getting the services you need.

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