

The Psycho-social Basis for Social Work in Oncology

David K. Wellisch, Ph.D.

Professor-in-Residence

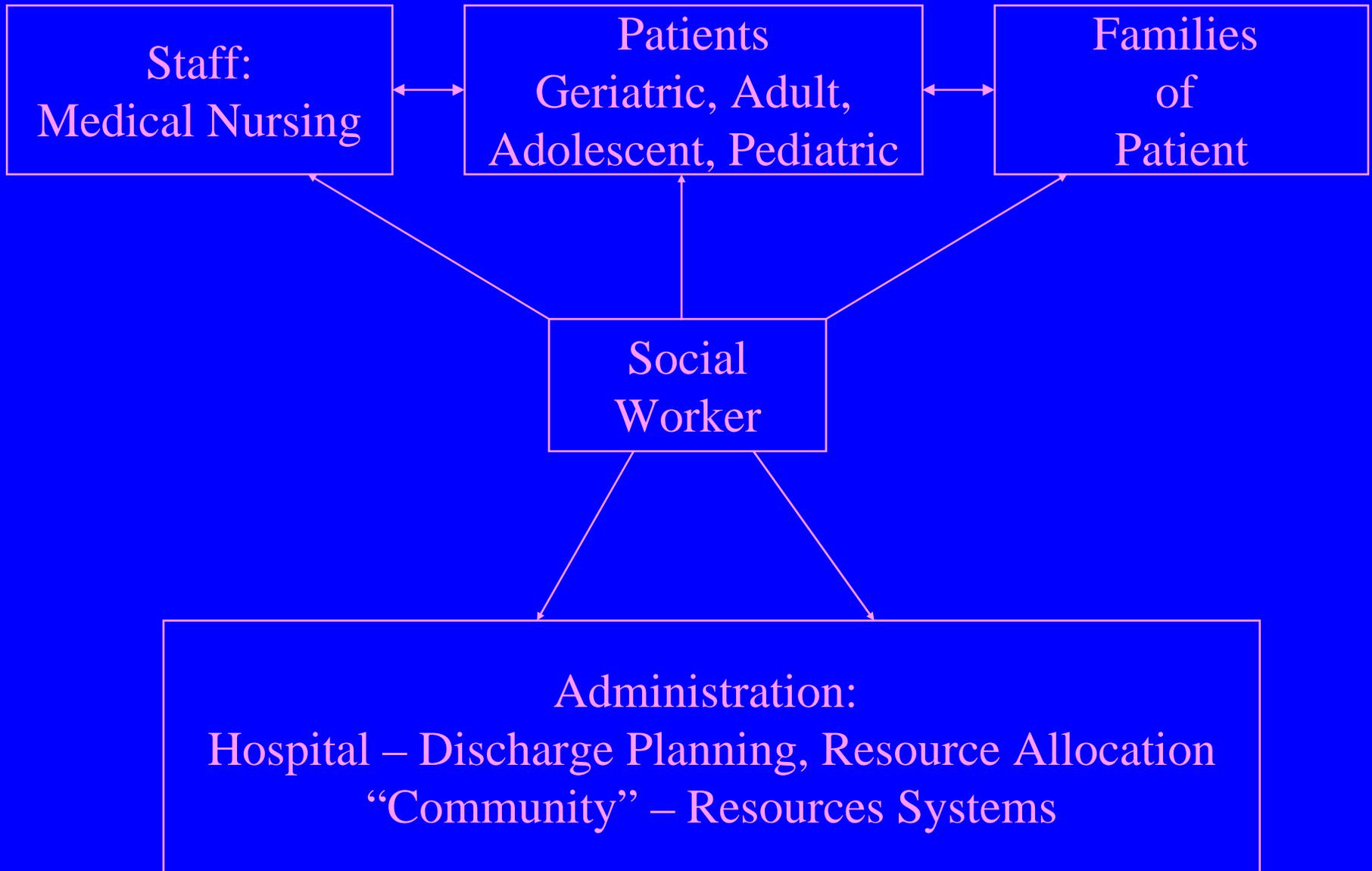
Department of Psychiatry

U.C.L.A. SCHOOL OF MEDICINE.

- Social Worker is often the only mental health professional in the oncology setting
- Other disciplines have psycho-social training but social work is focused full time on psycho-social issues of patients, families, and staff

- Oncology Social Workers are consultants and service deliverers to an oncology “system” which is diverse and complex
- This promotes in the Oncology Social Worker:
 - Role Fragmentation
 - Multiple & competitive pulls on Social Worker’s time and attention
- Key issue on Oncology Social Worker’s role is to effectively “work” & integrate the system

Oncology “System”



Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

1. Services to Patients, Families, & Caregivers

Goals of Practice:

- Fostering coping/adaptation to cancer to cancer and its treatments to help patients maintain quality-of-life
- Assisting patients in navigating through healthcare systems to achieve quality-of-life
- Mobilizing new or existing family, system, and community resources to provide social and emotional support to patients
- Advocating on behalf of patients and families to address their needs and for policies and programs that will benefit them

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

1. Services to Patients, Families, & Caregivers

Functions of Clinical Practice - 1:

- Completion of psychosocial assessment to determine patient & families strengths and needs relative to coping with cancer
- Use of high risk screening criteria to identify patients/families in need of specialized social work services (specific)
- Development of multidisciplinary care plans with patient/family based on mutual goals (required by JCAHO)

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

1. Services to Patients, Families, Caregivers

Functions of Clinical Practice - 2:

- Use of a range of therapeutic interventions including: individual, group, couple, family, and multiple family therapies to deal with issues in each phase of illness
- Provision of case management services
- Provision of pre-admission, transfer, and discharge planning services

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

1. Services to Patients, Families, Caregivers

Functions of Clinical Practice - 3:

- Provision to direct assistance to meet financial, transportation, lodging, and other needs
- Advocacy to remove barriers to quality care, to address gaps in services to secure protection or existing laws

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

2. Services to Institutions, Agencies, and Units

Goals of Practice:

- To assist social work colleagues and members of other disciplines to manage stresses of clinical practice
- To contribute the multidisciplinary effort to provide quality medical psycho-social care
- To ensure that agencies & institutions are responsible to the needs of individual patients, families, and caregivers

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

2. Services to Institutions, Agencies, and Units

Functions of Practice:

- Education and consultation to professionals on psycho-social factors affecting cancer care (psycho-social “rounds”)
- Collaboration with other professionals in service delivery (multidisciplinary team)
- Development of programs for psych-social care of patients, families, caregivers
- Provision of support services to aid stress in management

Scope of Practice: Oncology Social Work

3. Services to the Community

Functions of Practice:

- Education of communities to increase awareness of psycho-social needs of patients, families, caregivers
- Collaboration with community agencies to remove barriers to cancer prevention, screening, early detection, access to care
- Collaboration in development of special programs and resources to address community based needs
- Consultation with voluntary cancer agencies (such as American Cancer Society) to provide community education and program development

Conclusions: The Psycho-social Basis for Social Work in Oncology - 1

- Psycho-social issues profoundly affect quality-of-life of cancer patients, families, caregivers
- Oncology Social Workers are well trained to address quality-of-life issues in cancer diagnosis, treatment, post-treatment, and bereavement
- Oncology Social Workers often the only full time discipline dedicated to psycho-social issues in oncology care settings

Conclusions: The Psycho-social Basis for Social Work in Oncology - 2

- Oncology Social Workers address multiple issues including psycho-social support, coordination of service provision, and resource provision
- Oncology Social Workers have complex, multifaceted roles interfacing with patients, institutions, and community agencies
- Oncology Social Workers face role fragmentation and many competing pulls on their time in their work activities

Conclusions: The Psycho-social Basis for Social Work in Oncology - 3

- Oncology Social Workers work at multiple “levels”, these include:
 - a) Patient, family, caregiver
 - b) Units, institutions, agencies
 - c) Community
- Given position of Oncology Social Workers on Units in institutions, they are often in a unique position to provide support services to oncology staff to aid in stress management

Conclusions: The Psycho-social Basis for Social Work in Oncology - 4

- Given the complexities of oncology, Oncology Social Workers have become sub-specialized in the jobs: (at U.C.L.A.)
 - a) Radiation Oncology Social Worker
 - b) Pediatric Oncology Social Worker
 - c) Bone Marrow Transplant Social Worker
 - d) Discharge Planning Oncology Social Worker
 - e) Mann Center (psychotherapy specialist) Oncology Social Worker