



The Role of Social Work in the Changing Health Care Landscape ***Principles for Public Policy***

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) acknowledges that the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) is changing the health-care infrastructure in the United States and that the role of social work in the health care system is evolving. Social workers are not only an important part of ACA implementation, especially as patients navigate new options to access health care, but are also an important part of the team of health professionals helping lead health-care transformation in the United States. Additionally, the focus of social workers to address social determinants of health in the evolving health-care environment fills a critical gap, which is vital to improving health and health care.

Evidence shows that the involvement of a social worker in patient care and well-being effectively improves care and outcomes. Following are two examples that illustrate the significant value that social workers bring to effective models of health care:

- The Preventable Admissions Care Team (PACT) is an intensive transitional care program that uses social workers to target patients at high risk for a 30-day readmission. Through a comprehensive bedside assessment, PACT social workers partner with patients and family caregivers to identify known risks (e.g., lack of timely follow-up care, medication noncompliance) and 17 areas of psychosocial strain (e.g., mental health, housing, literacy) that compound the risk. The postdischarge 35-day intervention is titrated based on the degree of psychosocial strain assessed and is delivered through phone calls, accompaniments, and home visits, as needed. PACT has been successful in reducing readmissions by 40% and emergency department visits by 50% for high-risk patients across different populations. Program acceptance and completion rates are higher than 90%. More information on PACT can be viewed here: <http://www.healthleadersmedia.com/page-2/MAG-278902/Predictive-Modeling-Options-to-Cut-Preventable-Admissions>
- The Bridge Model is an evidence-based, social work-led transitional care intervention. With more than 40 partners nationwide, it relies on master's-prepared social workers to conduct comprehensive assessments and to intervene with intensive care coordination, which starts in hospitals and follows a client's discharge to help older adults successfully transition back to the community. Evidence has shown that this model lowers readmission rates; provides greater client understanding of personal health management, including prescribed medication purposes and processes; and increases attendance at physician appointments. The Bridge Model has been identified as evidence-based by the Agency on Healthcare Research & Quality, and six Bridge Model partnerships have been awarded Community-based Care Transitions Program (CCTP) funding. Recent outcomes from participation in the CCTP indicate a 25% reduction in 30-day readmissions among Bridge clients, reducing Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) spending by \$245,000 per Bridge Coordinator per year. Information on the Bridge Model can be viewed here: <http://www.transitionalcare.org/the-bridge-model/>

The demand for social workers to meet the increased health-care needs in the United States is also growing, highlighting the importance of the education and training social workers receive. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the need for health-care social workers is predicted to grow much faster than the average for all occupations between 2012 and 2022 (27%).

As the social work community considers its expanding role in the changing health-care environment, especially regarding innovations that support the Triple Aim (better care for patients, better health for communities, and lower costs), CSWE supports the following principles that correspond with its mission.

Critical Role of Social Work in Improving Health and Health Care

- Policies should ensure that today's social work students are educated and trained to work in a health-care environment that values the role of social work as a conduit to improved health and health care. Financial policies should encourage care coordination and realize the significance of an integrated team-based approach to improve health and health care.
- Policies that allow a professional to perform the full extent of his or her training and/or licensure in a health-care setting are critical to meet the increased health demands in the United States, particularly in rural and underserved areas.
- To meet the growing and diverse needs of patients, medical education policies and federally funded demonstration projects should be expanded, or their models should be replicated, to support graduate education for social workers in addition to programs that currently support physicians and nurses.

Integrated Team-Based Care Is Essential to Improving Health

- Integrated team-based care is critical to improving health and coordinating care. It is important that the models of care tested through the CMS Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation encourage and support an integrated team-based approach that includes social workers.
- Federal support is essential for education and training programs to successfully increase the number of health professionals prepared to work in an integrated team-based environment. Education and training programs should prepare social workers for work in health-care settings.

Social Determinants of Health Should be Incorporated Into Federal Health-Care Activities

- To meet the goals of better care, better health, and lower costs policies, new models of care must acknowledge the value of incorporating social determinants of health.

Integrating Behavioral Health Is Important to Ensure a Strong and Successful Health-Care Infrastructure in the United States

- Behavioral health cannot be separated from the national health-care conversation. Real improvements in health care will be achieved only through a holistic approach that integrates behavioral health into health-care reforms at all levels and in all models.

Data Collection and Use Is Vital to Ensuring Progress

- Data collected from new models of care are vital to ensure that progress is being made. Data collection should be conducted in a way that ascertains the role/value of each member of the interprofessional team.

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CSWE is a national association of social work education programs and individuals that ensures and enhances the quality of social work education for a professional practice that promotes individual, family, and community well-being, and social and economic justice.