

DRAFT

Primary Care Social Work: Definition and Role

“The Social Work profession promotes change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work” (International Federation of Social Work, 2001).

Definition of the Primary Care Social Worker:

The Primary Care Social Worker working as part of a multi-disciplinary team aims to promote health and well-being, focuses on fostering advocacy and empowerment and seeks to encourage self-help in the local community (IASW, 2008).

“The focus of primary care social work is to support the delivery of health and personal social services at the local level. Social work’s particular area of expertise relates to personal social services. Delivering such services involves supporting the service user to improve their own circumstances and health status. In this work, the values and related approaches that a primary care social worker would use include advocacy, promotion of independence, an individualised care plan and the promotion of dignity, respect, client choice and self esteem” (IASW, 2008: 4/5). One of the key aims of a primary care social work service is to facilitate ease of access to a social worker as a means both to avoid the deterioration of client’s psycho-social circumstances and to facilitate early interventions of required services and agencies.

The Role of the Primary Care Social Worker Includes the Following:

- Assessment of bio-psychosocial aspects of health and well-being
- Concrete service provision
- Counselling and therapeutic services

- Consultation with other health care providers about the biopsychosocial factors and their implications for health and well being
 - Education and training in bi-opsychosocial aspects of illness and intervention strategies
 - Community development and capacity building
- (Preparing for Change: Social Work and Primary Health Care, 2003, Canada).

The role of the primary care social worker will be influenced by the needs of each primary care area to which the social worker is attached. It is expected that in the main, the social worker will act as a resource to other members of the team and to service users through established networks with local services, both statutory and voluntary, appropriate to the needs of the service user.

Role of the Primary Care Social Worker within the Identification and Prevention of Abuse:

“Social Workers as members of primary care teams will have a role in identifying and preventing abuse for vulnerable adults and may make initial child welfare assessments and provide crisis intervention in families where domestic abuse, including elder abuse, is suspected or detected. Child and Family Social Work Services continue to have the responsibility for referrals concerning Child Welfare”. (IASW, 2008: 2). “When family or care systems for adults with disabilities or older people are breaking down or where abuse or neglect is suspected, social workers have the skills to intervene to arrange for care, for legal intervention and or for the up-skilling of care-givers where that may be necessary”. (IASW Submission 2008 P.3)

Referral Criteria:

- 1 The individual/family being referred must reside in the catchment area of the Primary Care Team and or be a patient of the GP attached to the PCT.
- 2 The individual/family must be aware that the referral is being made, be prepared to engage with the social work service and give consent to their situation being discussed between professionals on the team.

- 3 It is desirable that referrals be made in writing to the social work service.
- 4 It may also be necessary to engage in a 'follow up' discussion with the referring professional in order to gather a complete service user profile.
- 5 Agreement regarding the reason for referral will be necessary in order to prevent an overlap in service delivery.

The above alongside effective multi-disciplinary communication and referral pathways will ensure timely, effective and efficient service delivery.

Nature of work undertaken by the Primary Care Team Social Worker:

The social worker will work with clients on both an individual and group basis who are living in the PCT catchment area or whose GP is a member of the Primary Care Team.

A full psycho-social assessment of need will be provided.

Situations which may warrant a referral to the PCT Social Worker:

- Emotional and practical support to individuals and families adjusting to changing life situations as a result of illness, bereavement, financial difficulties, relationship breakdown, unemployment, trauma, suicide etc
- People who are socially isolated due to illness, disability or lack of supports.
- Advice to professionals and service users on a range of issues including housing and accommodation, financial/welfare matters and legal issues;
- Support for carers of older persons and persons with disabilities,
- Short term supportive counseling, emotional and practical support and referral to appropriate long term services where necessary,
- Supporting self-motivation and self-help; and where appropriate advocating on behalf of service users.
- Facilitating self-help; anxiety management and carer support groups etc where the need arises.
- Persons who have been discharged from hospital and are returning to live in the PCT catchment area where the need for Social Work intervention has been identified.

- People who are suffering from a mental health illness which is not severe enough for them to be linked in with the Mental Health Community Services and require short term emotional or practical support.
 - Support to families affected by addiction.
 - Support to families and individuals affected by domestic violence
 - Child Welfare concerns related to supporting parents to cope with:
 - Parenting
 - Teen pregnancy – from the age of 17 and over
 - Child with physical illness or disability
 - Child with mental health difficulties
 - Child with intellectual disability
 - Parent/family member with physical health difficulties *
 - Parent/family member with mental health difficulties*
 - Parent/family member with intellectual disability*
- * Where these difficulties are not resulting in the child’s basic care needs being neglected and parent is still able to fulfil parenting role. In the event that this is not the case and there are child protection concerns, please refer to appropriate department.

Target Group:

Referrals from All Age Groups will be accepted.

- Young families and single parents
- Persons affected by domestic violence
- Carers
- Older persons
- Minority ethnic groups
- Persons with disabilities
- Couples and families in conflict
- Vulnerable families and children
- Parents in stress
- Person’s who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless

- People with substance abuse including alcohol who are not linked into existing services
- People affected by another's substance abuse issues
- Persons with various and multiple complex needs
- Persons who are newly diagnosed with an illness / disability
- Persons experiencing life changing situations such as loss of income through unemployment / housing / separation / bereavement.

The above list is not exhaustive. The Social Work Service is open to any person whose health and well-being is affected by social factors.

In order to avoid duplication of services, referrals which are not suitable for the Primary Care Social Worker include:

- Families/individuals whom are already linked to an existing Social Work Service, whether it is statutory or voluntary.
- Cases of elder abuse or suspected elder abuse. Where team members have concerns regarding these issues, they should contact the HSE Elder Abuse Case-Worker in their area.
- Child Protection Work (i.e. allegations of physical, emotional, sexual abuse or neglect). Primary Care Team members should contact the Duty Team Child Protection Social Worker team in their area.
- Child Welfare work where the issues include alcohol or substance abuse, domestic violence or where parents are refusing to engage with services. These cases are to be referred to the Duty Child Protection Team.
- Discharge Planning – however, people can be referred to the PCT Social Worker *as part of the discharge plan* upon return to the community where the need for social work intervention has been identified.
- Clients presenting with issues relating to severe mental health. A Community Mental Health Social Work referral should be made.

References:

- IASW (2008) *Submission prepared by the Irish Association of Social Workers to the Primary Medical Care subcommittee of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children*
- International Federation of Social Workers (2001) *Code of Ethics*
- *Preparing for Change: Social Work and Primary Health Care* (2003) Canada, Government Publications
- Primary Care Pilot Project Social Workers, personal communication and document on *Role of Social Work in Primary Care, 2007*