Evaluation Of the Roles of Social Worker in A Clinical Setting: A Case Study of Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (Rsuth)

Dr. Ihua Confidence Waribo
Department Of Human Physiology, Faculty of Basic Medical Sciences, Federal University Otuoke, Bayellsa

***Abstract*—This study investigated the roles of social worker in clinical setting of Rivers State University Teaching Hospital. The population of the study was 74683 with sample size of 400. Taro Yamane formula was used in determining the sample with significant level of 0.05%. The data analysis technique used for this study was simple percentage for questions answered by the respondents. This study has succeeded in identifying the roles of social worker in clinical setting in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital. The medical social workers are instrumental to patient's assistance, reassurance, encouragement, psychotherapy, counseling, case selection and planning as well as mediation and conflict resolution between patients, patient relatives and hospital staff. It is therefore concluded that medical social workers should be empowered, supported and financed for adequate function. It is recommended that government should increase employment quota of medical social workers in clinical setting to overcome the challenges of short staffing geared towards increasing function and output.**

***Index Terms*—Social Worker, Clinical Setting, Health Professionals, Medical Social Worker, Character Management.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Medical social workers typically work in the hospital, skilled nursing facility or hospice, have a graduate degree in the field and work with patients and their families in need of psychosocial help. Medical social workers assess the psychosocial functioning of patients and families and intervene as necessary. Interventions may include connecting patients and families to necessary resources, finances and support. Just like doctors, nurses and therapists, social workers are experts in their field. One of the benefits of social worker in hospital setting is to ensure that the patient knows the available services and this can help patients know the choice of services to undertake.

Social workers have played essential roles in clinical setting since the 20-21 centuries (IJTSRD, 2021). Social work was introduced to clinical setting in the United States by Dr. Richard C. Cabot in 1905 (IJTSRD, 2021). In clinical setting, the medical social worker are instrumental to patients' assistance and reassurance of patients relative, helping families of health challenged individuals cope with illness, diseases and disabilities (IJTSRD, 2021). They also enhance hospitalization by focusing particularly on their psychosocial needs including their emotional reactions and adaptation (IJTSRD, 2021).

Over time, social work's function and influence in clinical settings have expanded significantly (Rosen, 2019). In addition to assisting hospitalized patients and their families, social worker also provides counseling, hospice services, psychotherapy and counseling in mental health agencies and treatment of individuals with eating disorders (Rosen, 2019). The social workers are also involved in helping individuals with substance use disorders (Rosen, 2019). Social worker's specialized role in the clinical setting is to help patients and their relatives cope with illness, diseases and disabilities (Miler, et al., 2015).

They also provide patients and their families with effective counseling and information about their challenges and referral of the needed resources like home health care, financial assistance, nursing home placement (Miller et al., 2015). Social workers are also skilled in organizing and facilitating support groups for various populations such as cancer patients, rape victims and impaired adults and infants' patients (Miller et al., 2015).

They work to enhance the availability of community-based resources, thereby enhancing healthcare services in low-income individuals and for children with required Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) by advocating on behalf of individual patients in need of medical services and to ensure that important public services and policies related to health care are properly addressed (Miller, 2018). Medical social workers typically function as part of interdisciplinary team including physicians, nurses, rehabilitation staff, clergy, and healthcare administrators (Miller, 2019).

Some occasions, they facilitate the process through which healthcare professionals negotiate differences of opinion or conflict among themselves concerning specific ethical issues (Miller, 2019). Social worker also helps the needy mediate in resolving critical issues (Miller, 2019). Their sensitivity towards ethical and cultural diversity can be particularly help when there is clash between patient and families (Miller, 2019). Medical social workers can clarify difference among the ethical obligations that guide various professions (Ebube, 2023). For example, a social worker in health care setting can help clarify ethical responsibility of various professionals when staff suspects child abuse or identifies patients with AIDS, hepatitis and other diseases capable of endangering others to a third party (Ebube, 2023).

Healthcare social workers are also involved in discussion and formulation of the ethical aspects of healthcare policies and administration (Miller, 2019). Social workers in clinical setting also participate as members of clinical ethnical committee that discusses ethically complex issues, cases and policies (Miller, 2019). Social workers in the hospital help patients and their relatives understands certain illnesses and their diagnostic process. They provide advice on decision to be

made (Espalo, 2010). Healthcare and social worker share many common values by helping people with dignity and trust (Espalo, 2010). However, the focus of social work is on the social relationship in healthcare delivery (Espalo, 2010).

II. METHODOLOGY

- Research Design

The design of this study was descriptive survey. Descriptive survey is an appropriate choice when the research aim is to identify characteristics, frequencies, trends and categories. This procedure is particularly useful for field study of this nature because according to Nworgu B.G. (2010) descriptive survey are those studies which aim at collecting data and describing them in a systematic manner, the characteristics or facts about a given population. It is useful when not much is known yet about a topic or problem.

Before you can research about something that happened, one need to understand how, when and where it happened. It can answer what, where, when and how questions. A descriptive research design can use a wide variety of research methods to investigate one or more variables. Unlike in experimental research, the researcher does not control or manipulate any variable, but only observes and measures them. Some of the common methods used in collecting data in descriptive research include surveys, interviews, observations, case studies and portfolios. According to Creswell, the descriptive design is primarily used to gain an understanding of a group or phenomenon.

- Area of study

Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (RSUTH) was established in March 1925 as Braithwaite Memorial Hospital (BMH) and originally served as a medical facility for senior civil servants. It later became General Hospital and was upgraded to teaching hospital. It is located at No. 6-7 Harley Street, Old GRA Port Harcourt, Rivers State. It is located in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. It has a population of 74,683.

- Population of Study

Study population is the total members of a defined class of people, objects, places, or events selected because if their relevance to the study and their ability to answer research questions. In any research study, the study population has to be clearly defined according to particular characteristics such as age, sex, residence or geographical accessibility. The population of the study includes all medical social workers and all patients and patient relatives in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (RSUTH) that requires the services of medical social workers. The population Rivers State University Teaching Hospital is about 160,000.

- Method of Data Collection

Data were collected via two sources of data. The primary source includes questionnaire, personal observation and interview. The secondary source of data used to support the findings include textbooks, journals, newsletters and newspaper.

- Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage for questions by the respondents. It is a creative innovative idea which is highly simplified, easily understandable method of data analysis for accurate presentation of result. This method of analysis helps in comparing and reviewing the result and progress. It plays a crucial role in comparing and contrasting various topics. Hence, it helps draw a comparative analysis of various subjects. The percentage is used to evaluate extensive data and hence presents an accurate value.

- Data Presentation and Analysis

Respondents were asked questions in consonance with the questionnaire as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Responses on if there is relationship between medical social-worker and patients in the Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	200	0	200	50%
Agree	100	0	100	25%
Strongly disagree	30	0	30	7.5%
Disagree	30	0	30	7.5%
Undecided	38	0	38	9.5%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

From the table above, 200(50%) strongly agree that there is relationship between social workers, patients and patient relatives, 100(25%) agreed that there is link between social worker and patients, 30(25%) disagreed while 38(9.5%) were undecided on the idea.

Table 2: Responses on Whether Social Worker Plays a Role in Treatment Facilitation of Patients in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	148	0	148	37%
Agree	150	0	150	37.5%
Strongly disagree	40	0	40	10%
Disagree	30	0	30	7.5%
Undecided	30	0	30	7.5%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

From the table above its revealed that 148 (37%) strongly agreed that social worker plays vital role in treatment facilitation of patients in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital; 150(37.5%) also agreed that social worker plays role in treatment of patients, 40 (10%) strongly disagreed, 30 (7.5%) disagreed while 30 (7.5%) were undecided of the opinion.

Table 3: Responses on whether social-worker plays a role in Counselling of Patients in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	200	0	200	50.3%
Agree	198	0	198	49.7%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0%
Undecided	0	0	0	0%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

The above table revealed that 200 (50.2%) strongly greed that medical social workers play a role in guidance and counselling of patients, 198 (49.7%) agreed, 0 (0) strongly disagreed 0 (0%) disagreed, 0 (0%) were undecided to the idea.

Table 4: Responses on whether social-worker plays a role in Financial Assistance to Special Need Patients in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	180	10	190	47.5%
Agree	128	10	138	35%
Strongly disagree	30	10	40	10%
Disagree	20	10	30	7.5%
Undecided	0	0	0	0%
Total	398	40	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

The above table revealed that 190(47.5%) strongly agreed that social worker play significance role in helping the special need to patients get financial assistance, 138(35%) agreed, 40(10%) strongly disagreed 30(7.5%) disagreed, 0 (0%) were undecided.

Table 5: Responses on whether social-worker plays a role in conflict resolution between patients and other medical staff

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	200	0	200	50.3%
Agree	198	0	198	49.7%

Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0%
Undecided	0	0	0	0%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

The above table above, revealed that 200(50.3%) strongly agreed, 198(49.7%) agreed, 0(0%) strongly disagreed 0(0%) disagreed, 0(0%) while 0(0%) were undecided.

Table 6: Responses on whether social-worker plays a role in Provision of Mental Health Services in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Frequently	Percentage
Strongly agree	200	0	200	50.3%
Agree	198	0	198	49.7%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0%
Undecided	0	0	0	0%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Fieldwork, 2025

From the above table, it is revealed that 200(50.3%) strongly agreed that social workers play role in provision of mental health service in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital while 198 (49.7%) agreed, 0(0%) strongly disagree, 0(0%) disagreed, 0(0%) were undecided.

Table 7: Responses on whether medical social workers encounter challenges while discharging their roles in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital

Responses	Yes	No	Total	Percentage
Strongly agree	158	0	158	40%
Agree	158	0	158	40%
Strongly disagree	40	0	40	10%
Disagree	40	0	40	10%
Undecided	2	0	2	0%
Total	398	0	398	100%

Sources: Survey Data, 2025

From the table above, 158(40%) strongly agreed that social workers in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital encounters challenges while delivery services, 158(40%) also agreed, 40(10%) strongly disagreed 40(10%) disagreed, 2(0.4%) were undecided.

- Discussion of Findings

This study evaluated the role of social worker in clinical setting. Information were collected through observation, personal interview using questionnaire. These questionnaires were properly completed by respondents who filled and returned literatures also formed basis of this discussion. Analysis form table 5, revealed that there is relationship between clinical social worker and patients as well as patients' relatives. Clinical social worker typically works in the hospital, assisting patients and patient's families in need of psychosocial help to help them recover and strengthen their ability to adapt and reintegrate into the society. This relationship between social worker and patient ranked highest with 75%.

From analysis on table 6, it is revealed that social worker plays vital role in the facilitation of treatment for patients in Rivers State University Teaching Hospitals as admitted by correspondence and this was expressed by Chetkow-Yanoor B.B (2002) in literature review who expatiated that social worker are involved in gathering groups of people together enhancing their various needs and ensuring that they succeed. The role of social worker in facilitation of treatment for patients ranked highest with 72.5%

Analysis from table 7 shows that clinical social worker plays a role in counselling of patients as admitted by correspondence and this was expressed by Brown, J.A (2002) who expatiated that social worker help their clients express their needs clarifying their problems, explore resolution strategies to develop and expand the capacities of clients to deal with problems. A key function of this role is to empower the people by affirming their personal strengths and their capacities to deal with problems effectively and independently and this social worker's role in counselling of patients ranked highest with 100%.

From analysis on table 8 on the role of social worker in helping the special need patients gets financial assistance to support their treatment need, it is revealed that social worker in clinical setting plays vital role in ensuring that less privileged patients, special need fund their treatment and secures their financial assistance and this was expressed by researchers in the literature review. It ranks highest with 82.5%.

From analysis on table 9 on whether medical social worker plays important role in conflict resolution in the clinical setting, revealed that medical social worker act as mediator who intervenes in disputes between parties, medical social worker often have large caseloads and are confronted with highly complex cases involving patients with psychosocial issues as expressed in related review of literatures and this ranked highest with 80%.

Analysis from table 10 revealed that social worker contributes immensely in rendering mental health services. Medical social worker provides 60% of mental health services in clinical setting. They help people with range mental health concerns like addiction, psychological trauma, drug misuse and depression as admitted by correspondence and expressed by Fox, S.T (2013) in literature review and this ranked highest with 100%.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Conclusion

Social workers have being identified to paly essential role in clinical setting. They are instrumental to patient's assistance by helping families of health challenged individual cope with illness, diseases and disabilities. They also enhance hospitalization by focusing on the psychosocial needs of the patient.

They facilitate this hospitalization through health care professional medication in resolution of critical issues which enhances relationship in healthcare delivery.

Social workers in clinical settings often have large caseloads, juggling patients with varying needs, making a challenge to provide comprehensive level of support needed.

Despite this challenge, social workers in clinical setting have helped individuals and families review their needs and makes support plans through advocacy, counseling, mediation, researching, educating, case management and strategic planning geared towards helping clients deals with their problems.

Conclusively, medical social workers are instrumental to patient's assistance, psychotherapy, counselling, treatment selection and planning.

In view of the above, it is therefore concluded that medical social workers should be empowered and supported for more adequate and participation

- Recommendations

The following recommendations have been drawn from the present study

i. In clinical settings, the role of social worker have been hijacked by other medical personnel leading to role conflicts and this has created a gap between social worker and patients interaction frequency. In view of the above, proper placement of social workers in the job specification to match their knowledge should be encouraged.
ii. To enhance effective, professional and accountable social work practice, clinical social workers should adhere to the values and ethnics of social work profession, utilizing code of ethics as guide to ethical decision making.
iii. During intervention, social workers should incorporate all aspects of social work models to enhance their understanding about patient's illness that will help them for better treatment planning along with other medical professionals in the medical team.
iv. Heavy caseloads are common in the social work service in clinical setting putting substantial pressure on them, it is therefore recommended that government should employ more social workers in clinical setting for quick processing of cases and avert the negative impacts on the patients.
v. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are encourage to provide support to medical social as quick as possible to help the needy when necessary
vi. Public lecture such as seminars, door-to-door campaign should be encouraged be educate the patients and their relatives about the roles of social worker in medical practice

REFERENCES

[1] Mazibuko, .F.NM. (1996). Social workers and welfare policy: Related functions and skills in practice. Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work, 32(2): 148-161.
[2] McKendrick, B.W. (Ed.). (1990). Introduction to social work in South Africa (2nd ed.). Pretoria: Haum-Jager.
[3] Midgley, J. (1995). Social Development. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
[4] Midgley, J. (1996). Promoting a developmental perspective in social welfare: The contribution of South African schools of social work. Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work, 32(1): 1-7.
[5] Miller, N., Marko, T., Lord, F., Reuben, J., Flerming, D., Frank, T. and Kohen, B. (2015). Medical social worker as interdisciplinary team alongside other medical officers. Medical Sociology, 30, 300-400.
[6] Miller, N.S. (2019). The mediation roles of hospital social worker. The Lancer, 180 (1000) 1-5.
[7] Munson, C.E. (2013). Clinical Social Work Supervision (2nd ed.). Binghamton: The Haworth Press.
[8] Mupedziswa, R. (1996). Social work and Christianity: Complementarity or conflict? Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work, 32(4): 378-386.
[9] Nelson-Jones, R. (2003). Human Relationship Skills (2nd ed.). London: Cassell Educational Ltd.
[10] Okoh, B.C. (2018). Advocacy, counseling and mediation. International Science Research Journal, 1(4): 7-19.
[11] Okpala, T.B. (2016). The main roles of social worker: Analysis of the clinical roles in social work. Journal of Medical Social Work, 70, 69-78.
[12] Okwuma, T.T. (2018). Principles and techniques of helping families. The Lancet, 380(7000): 20-48.
[13] Olivier, S.J. (1995). Armoede en die taak van die maatskaplike werker binne die raamwerk van die HOP. Lesing aangebied tydens 'n vergadering van die Boland-tak van die VMWSA: Wellington.
[14] Osei-Hwedie, K. (1996). The indigenisation of social work practice and education in Africa: The dilemma of theory and method. Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work, 32(3): 215-225.
[15] Paniagna, F.A. 1994. Assessing and treating Culturally Diverse Clients. London: SAGE Publications.
[16] Paul, A.A. (2017). Scope of social work profession in medical setting. Journal of Social Science, 7:57-60.
[17] Payne, M. (1991). Modern social work theory: A critical introduction. London: Macmillan.

[18] Pinelli, T., Fernstrom, B., Galos, P. and Brith, T. (2016). Burnout as risk factor in healthcare provision. Journal of Psychology, 400: 1-9.

[19] Plionis, E.M. & Lewis, H.J. 1995. Teaching Cultural Diversity and Oppression: Preparation for Risk - The Coverdale Model. Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 12(1/2): 175-191.

[20] Ponterotto, J.G et al. (Eds.). (1995). Handbook of Multicultural Counseling. London: SAGE Publications.

[21] Pruis, SE. (1997). In Teoretiese deurskouing van geselekteerde modelle in maatskaplike groepwerk. Ongepubliseerde M.A.-Tesis. Universiteit van Oranje-Vrystaat: Bloemfontein.

[22] Reeser, L.C. & Epstein, I. (2000). Professionalisation and Activism in Social Work. New York: Columbia University Press.

[23] Rhoodie, N. & Liebenberg, I. (Eds.). (1994). Democratic nation-building in South Africa. Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.

[24] Rosen, E.C. (2019). Role of medical social worker in clinical setting. State of the Art Review. 24(3): 110-125.

[25] Scarpitti, F.R. & Andersen, M.L. (1992). Social Problems (2nd ed.). New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

[26] Sheafor, B.W, Horejsi, C.R. & Horejsi GA. (1994). Techniques and Guidelines for social work practice (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

[27] Sika, T.S. (2014). Social work perspective and roles in medical practice. American Journal of Clinical Sociology, 58: 200-310.

[28] Sikhitha, T.M. (1996). Social work practice in cross cultural situations: some guidelines for practice. Maatskaplike Werk/Social Work, 32(1): 61-66.

[29] South African Institute of Race Relations, (1995). Race Relations Survey 1995. Fast Facts.

[30] Strydom, H. (2015). Die inhoud van 'n kursus in multi-kulturele maatskaplike werk. Maatskaplike Werk/social Work, 31(2): 115-125.

[31] Swanepoel, H. (2013). Community Development (2nd ed.). Kenwyn: Juta & Co, Ltd.

[32] Terblanche, W. (1995). Samesprekings met die Departement Maatskaplike werk van die Hugenote Kollege: Wellington.

[33] Terminology Comitee for Social Work (1995). Nuwe Woordeboek vir Maatskaplike Werk/New Dictionary of Social Work. Cape Town: CTP Book Printers.

[34] Thesnaar, C.H. (1993). Pastorale sorg aan die tradisionele Xhosa. Ongepubliseerde M.A.-Tesis. Stellenbosch: Universiteit van Stellenbosch.

[35] Thompson, D. (Ed.). (1995). Concise Oxford Dictionary (9th ed.). Oxford: Claredon Press.

[36] Van der Walt, B.J. (1991). Vooraf. In: Instituut vir Reformatoriese studie. Kultuurverskeidenheid in Afrika. Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1-5.

[37] Van Rensburg, H.J.C, Pretorius, E. & Fourie, A. (1992). Gesondheidsorg in Suid-Afrika. Pretoria: Academica.

[38] Van Rooyen, I.J.J. & Combrink, M.J. (2006). Gevallewerk. 'n Integrerende Benadering: Pretoria: Academica.

[39] Vinik, A. & Levin, M. (Eds.). (1991). Social Action in Group Work. New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.

[40] Wenocur, S. (Ed.). (2023). Social Work with Groups. Binghamton: The Haworth Press.

[41] Westman, T.S. and Bakker, B.D. (2008). Challenges of healthcare providers in medical settings. Journal of Social Medicine, 10:1-17.

[42] Whitaker, H.H. and Arrington, B.B. (2008). Challenges and roles of health workers in clinical system. Journal of Sociology, 10:15-19.

[43] Whitaller, B., Weismeller, T., Chark, U. and Wilson, F. (2006). National survey of licensed social worker, Review 12, 400-405.

[44] William, T., Manwell, B., Konrad, F. and Linzer H. (2007). Challenges of practice for social worker in hospital environment. Review of Practice, 18, 201-211

[45] Willy, J. (2015). Impact of social work practice on patient and patient's relatives. General Practice, 74. 100-108.

[46] Yamatani, F., Engel, T. and Spjedines, F. (2009). Quick processing cases negatively affect clients in social work care. Journal of Medical Sociology, 10: 18-21.

[47] Zastrow, C. (2006). Social Welfare Institutions (3rd ed.). Chicago: The Dorsey Press.

[48] Zastrow, C. (2006). The Practice of Social Work (3rd ed.). California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.