

# Training Bachelor of Social Work in Hospitals Theoretical and Practical Issues in Vietnam

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**Abstract:** *The social work profession has become and is becoming one of the occupations that meet the urgent needs of all aspects of human life. Social work practice in hospitals is one of the areas that are focusing on development in Vietnam as well as in many countries around the world. It is contributing to improving the quality of health care services. However, at present only a few hospitals have a social work department, social workers in the hospital are in the hospital officials, challenge to train social work practice in the hospitals, and the manner in which the health system operates in which employee role requirements will vary such as expertise, experience, and training level. This article shows an overview of hospital social work in Vietnam today. Theoretical and practical issues in social work training in the hospital. Especially giving the development directions of this science, which is the basis for scientists to research and make in-depth comparisons in the current global integration context.*

**Keywords:** social work, social work in hospitals, challenges and opportunities

## 1. Introduction

The social work profession has become and is becoming one of the occupations that meet the urgent needs of all aspects of human life. Social workers participate in current social problem solving to improve people's quality of life. Social work practice in hospitals is one of the areas that are focusing on development in Vietnam as well as in many countries around the world. From a practice perspective in the medical field towards the common mission of the sector, a group of American authors stated that "When we consider the mission of the social work sector, it is easy to see it as related to care, curing human mental problems, so the practice of social work in the medical field is a clear evidence of this role" [1].

Social work in the health sector has become more diversified when considering the specialties in disease, and the manner in which the health system operates in which employee role requirements will vary such as expertise, experience, and training level. According to Darell P. Wheeler and members of the American Association of Social Work, the emphasis is on qualifications and practicing certificate as a measure of the professional qualifications of the social worker in the hospitals "Hospital social workers must hold a bachelor's or master's degree from schools recognized by the American Society for Social Work Training. Depending on the statutory laws of each state, employees are required to be granted a practicing certificate related to the field they practice" [2].

On the other hand, according to Jessica A. Ritter et al (2009), confirmed the roles of social workers in the health sector "The social workers in the hospital are people who help patients and their families to cope effectively with pain, physical as well as psychological damage upon diagnosis, especially chronic

diseases, by providing supportive services for them to perform their social functions when they return to their families and communities". In general, depending on the context of each country at different times, the competency requirements of the social worker will change to fit the reality. Despite specific requirements in the health system, all social workers need to ensure core competencies of the social work sector.

### 1) Some concepts of social work in hospital

Social work is seen as a specific form of work with cases focusing on the relationship between illness and the social environment. According to Bartlett, "It's an important function of the social worker that is concerned with how patients see problems; It is not simply pure medical treatment but also involves social problems. In this way, social workers will facilitate the expansion of medical treatment for patients" [3].

According to the guidelines for social workers in the health sector of the Ministry of Health of the Philippines stated, "Hospital social work is a specialized area of social work that focuses on assisting patients and their families with health issues. Help them self-control and contribute to improving public health and social welfare" [4].

According to Vietnamese researchers who have generalized, social work in hospitals in the area of expertise where social workers support patients, relatives of patients have access to resources, social services, and psychological support society towards comprehensive health care.

### 2) History of social work in hospitals in Vietnam.

Social work has been around for a long time in Vietnam. However, it only officially became a professional career when there was the project 32/2010 / TTg, of the Prime Minister on

the development of social work careers in Vietnam for the period 2010-2020 [5]. This project has greatly contributed to the development of the social work profession in Vietnam and social work in the health sector. This project has contributed to the development of vocational powerful social work in Vietnam and social work in the medical field. Due to the frequent overloading of central hospitals and provinces across the country so that volunteer groups formed to assist patients have been around since the early 21st century. However, until the Decision, 2514 / QD-BYT of the Ministry of Health was issued in 2011 approving the Project to develop social work in the health sector for the period 2011-2020, this is an important legal basis for the hospital social work sector to form and develop [6].

### 3) Some of the main roles of social work and social workers in hospitals in Vietnam

Social work in hospitals particularly important role in creating a harmonious relationship and between the patient and those around him and with the medical staff. The social worker plays an important role in the hospital by helping the patient and family addressing the disease and effectiveness of treatment.

Although social work in hospitals in Vietnam is still a relatively new field, the government is interested in investing and developing. In recent years, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs have promoted the development of social work in hospitals in particular and in the health sector in general. According to Circular No. 43 of the Ministry of Health issued in 2015, the tasks of social work in the hospital have been clearly defined as follows:

Supporting, consulting, and solving social work issues for the patient and their family members in the process of medical examination and treatment; Information, communication, and dissemination, legal education; Advocacy to receive funding; training and retraining. Organizing a team of collaborators doing social work of the hospital and charity activities [7].

#### 4) The role of social workers in hospital

*Psychosocial assessment of the patient (also the client):* Factors that pose a high risk; determine the need/condition for services; identify strengths/capacity to cope; assessment informal network support for clients, ...

*Counseling / Psychology:* Assess the role of emotional and social/cultural factors in the health and behavioral status and provide appropriate intervention; enhance coping abilities related to feelings of loss, grief, and change roles; assessment and intervention related to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, anger management, ...

*Family education and patient education:* facilitate understanding of the hospital's processes; improve understanding of diseases.

*Consulting resources and building a plan:* Identify barriers and constraints to planning; facilitate the introduction and

application of government/community agencies' policy mechanisms; advocate for access to resources.

*Supportive care for outpatients:* Outpatient assistance to identify and obtain appropriate resources and support, treatment, and prevention of crisis or unnecessary hospitalization. Consulting, provide expertise / serve as a resource for interdisciplinary teams.

*Advocacy for the patient:* The role of the medical social worker is one of advocacy and liaison among patients, their families, hospitals, and the community. Help patients understand and adjust hospital procedures, interpret health plans, provide opportunities for patients to access medical services, helping families with financial planning in health care. Facilitating communication between patients, families, and relevant healthcare professionals is an ongoing clue to the social workers' treatment plan.

*Financial support:* When the cost of an acute and chronic illness is very high, families may not be able to finance the care of an ill family member. At this time, the social worker will mobilize and link financial resources to support the patient.

*Assessment:* Social workers make assessments about the condition as well as the emotional crisis it brings. Then report back to the hospital staff and cooperate with the hospital staff to find the best approach to helping with the patient.

*Legal aid:* Hospital social workers must take legal action to protect the patient. In the case of a guard, a strength of attorney or guardian may need to be appointed.

*Mobilizing resources:* Good support from friends, family, relatives, and society. The hospital social worker performs its role perfectly to manage the patient's social and emotional changes. They apply the necessary methods of social work and different treatments to deal with the patient's social and emotional aspects; mobilize community resources of patients [8].

### 5) Current situation of social work in hospitals in Vietnam today

The social work profession in Vietnam can be considered officially recognized since 2010 after the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 32/2010 / QD-TTGT, March 25, 2010. Social work in the health sector was also formed right after that when the Ministry of Health issued the Scheme "Development of social work in the health sector for the period 2011-2020".

In recent years, a number of central-level hospitals have also implemented social work activities with the participation of a contingent of part-time medical staff and volunteers to assist physicians in classifying patients, counseling, referral services, support to care for patients, ... has contributed to alleviating difficulties in the process of accessing and using medical examination and treatment services.

Some models of organizing social work activities in the hospital and in the community have also been formed in practice such as social work office, customer care department, social charity team, ... belonging to the hospital or social workgroup to participate in supporting people with HIV / AIDS, mentally ill patients, helping with functional rehabilitation in the commune /Ward,...However, social work activities in the industry are just spontaneous, not adjusted by legal documents. The staffs participating in the activity are mainly enthusiastic and experienced, there is no training in knowledge and skills, so they often lack professionalism, and the performance is not as expected.

Currently, there is no social work involvement at all 3 levels of activity in the health sector. First of all, in hospitals at all levels of the public and non-public sectors, medical examination and treatment are only performed by staff with medical and pharmaceutical expertise. Measures of social therapy have not been interested. Therefore, there are no documents regulating professional titles on social work in the human resource structure and there is no social work department in the hospital's organizational apparatus. Some hospitals, especially in the southern provinces, maintain social activities, but only for charity to help patients, but only for charity to help the patient, but still only the spontaneous employment by some individuals or voluntary organizations involved. These activities lack professionalism, are heavily rash, only help patients solve some urgent needs such as charity kitchen, fundraising, ... Meanwhile, most of the country's hospitals, especially the upper-level hospitals, are often in overload.

The medical staff does not have the time and ability to deal with many of the pressing needs of patients such as: exploit information on social demographic characteristics of patients, provide information on prices, quality, location of services, counseling on treatment regimen, counseling on prevention, mental reassurance for patients.... Therefore, there are many problems arising in hospitals such as fake services, fraud of the patient and the patient's family. In addition, the lack of information when accessing and using medical services, patient dissatisfaction with medical facilities, the tension in the relationship between patients and physicians.

According to the Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam in 2018, the whole country has about 1,125 hospitals with 215,640 patient beds. Among these, there are 46 central hospitals with 26,756 hospital beds, 447 provincial hospitals with 110,549 beds, 1,214 district hospitals with 77,134 hospital beds, and 155 non-public hospitals with 9,501 hospital beds [9]. If a social work network is formed in the hundreds of hospitals mentioned above, it also means that thousands of social workers will be needed. Social work activities at the hospital will not only play a role in supporting patients but also have a great effect in assisting physicians to reduce work pressure as well as improve treatment efficiency.

However, the fact is that currently, social workers in hospitals have not received formal training in this profession; many of

them are part-time staff or work in other areas and then transferred to the field of social work. That is not to mention, currently, social work activities in hospitals are still only carried out with solutions of objective nature to call for help for patients from social organizations, but there is no active cooperation between social workers and medical staff in the hospital together to improve the quality of medical examination and treatment.

The latest survey results of the health sector in 26 hospitals showed that only 5/26 of these hospitals had a focal point specializing in social work, accounting for 22.7%. The organizational model of specialized focal points in these 5 hospitals is also inconsistent, some are directly under the Board of Directors, others belong to the Nursing Room, others are in charge of the Youth Union. The rest of the hospitals are integrating social work activities in each department and affiliated department [10].

#### **6) Challenges for the social work sector in hospitals in Vietnam today**

Currently, for students of social work knowledge equipped, the skills to respond to graduate capacity to work at the hospital are increasingly improved. The training programs can range from approximately 120-130 credits with 45-50 credits of the knowledge of general education and over 80 credits of professional education knowledge (including basic knowledge of the social work industry, general knowledge of the social work industry, and specialized knowledge). Meanwhile, for social work in the hospital, there are only 3 credits, some places increase 2 credits for hospital practice, so students do not have enough knowledge, skills to meet the job when performing social work in the hospital for the reasons:

*Firstly*, the number of staff members working in the hospital is calculated on the hospital bed and hospital bed occupancy rate according to the Circular 08/2007 / TTLT-BYT-BNV of the Ministry of Home Affairs -Ministry of Health, June 25, 2007, personnel is divided by hospital classification, with the clinical rate accounting for 50-65%, subclinical and pharmacy 2215%, management - administration 18-20%. Article 4 of Circular 43 of the Ministry of Health of Vietnam stipulates that people working in social work departments include officials, staff specialized in social work; Specialized in communication, health, or other social sciences trained and fostered in knowledge about social work. With an 80% standard framework in the health sector, 20% for the administrative sector, as regulated by the Ministry of Health, special grade hospitals such as Cho Ray hospital, grade 1 hospital such as Children's Hospital I, Children's Hospital 2, Hospital 115, etc ...all social work departments were established. The second and third-tier hospitals are mostly district hospitals with social work teams and personnel allocated from departments. The majority of human resources in social work are not actually trained from the social work major. It is the nurses, other staff who are assigned to work in social work, so the main work in the hospital is for charity work.

*Secondly*, there are many shortcomings in training in hospital social work in universities. Especially with the duration of 3 credits for training in social work theory, 2 credits for practice in hospital; indeed, the knowledge provided is very little. Therefore, students have not fully visualized what needs to be done in the hospital context. Practice in hospitals for students of social work is limited, very short time, compared to the health sector from intermediate to university; students have nearly 50% of the time to study and practice at the hospital. Lack of a number of subjects related to majors such as survival signs, Health education communication, Students will find it very difficult and embarrassing to practice or be admitted to the hospital.

*Thirdly*, it is impossible to recognize common medical words used in hospitals such as clinical, subclinical, non-communicable chronic disease, etc. It is not possible to recognize and observe the actual state of the patient when facing the operation, as well as fulfill all the prescribed criteria of the hospital social worker. All these activities are evaluated annually in hospital quality according to 84 criteria to evaluate the quality of the Ministry of Health, made for all hospitals, publicly available.

*Finally*, guiding for students to practice in the hospital are the teachers, they have experience in social work in hospitals to guide students to embark on practical activities of hospital social work, learning from practice, comments to give the next plan to perform, what to practice from the hospitals. However, the current guidance of social work in Vietnamese hospitals is based on universities and training institutions [11].

The social work training system of universities and colleges in Vietnam often trains general social workers. Clinical social work in particular and the health sector, in general, is one of the highly specialized fields, so training to become a clinical social worker is still a big challenge. Currently, some social work training programs at universities in Vietnam only have a few subjects related to clinical practice such as basic consultation (3 - 4 credits - required), public health (2 credits - required), social work in the mental health field (2 credits - elective), psychiatry (2 credits - elective). Thus, looking at training programs in social work in hospitals in Vietnam, many shortcomings and limitations, can not meet the needs and nature of the current work in the hospital. Therefore, it is indispensable to grasp the background, role, and basic social work theory system. In addition, during practice, social workers in hospitals need to keep the frame and scope of work certain. That may be the reason why in the United States when you want to become a social worker in the hospital, you must have at least a master's degree and must hold the two highest practice certificates in the social work profession system [12].

### 7) Some development orientations for the social work sector in hospitals in Vietnam during the period of international integration as today

- a) *Designing a framework of training programs for social work in the hospital.* a) Course objectives and output

standards, with the characteristics of the social work model in the hospital, the module should be directed to the training of qualified staff and has a professional attitude to help the client (the patient) cope with the illness; assist in solving social problems during and after treatment. b) The structure subject, at present the number of masters of social work in the whole country is still very limited, and Vietnam has no standards for exams to grant a practice license for the social work profession such as United States, Britain, or some other countries.. Organizing seminars and training short courses in the context of social work is still a new sector in Vietnam [13].

- b) Conducting an investigation, surveying the need for additional human resources for social work in hospitals in each specific period to focus and key training in order to meet the recruitment requirements of hospitals. From there, ensuring to meet the balance of demand-supply between training institutions and employers. Implementing this solution requires the participation of hospitals and the local University and College education system. Specifically, the hospitals in the provinces and cities in order to closely follow the needs of additional human resources for hospital social work.
- c) To train and foster the hospital social work profession from the nurses and doctors who are working in hospitals. This force is more likely to have access to knowledge and skills of the social work profession because these people have been trained a lot in medical ethics in the practice. This solution associates with the training and recruiting of human resources of hospitals, when building annual hospital action plans, it is necessary to pay attention to this solution.
- d) Develop and perfect mechanisms and policies for coordination in training between the contingent of trainers participating in the hospital social work training and the doctor in the hospital. Thus, when students graduate, they will be equipped with the knowledge and a practical environment in the recruitment and working places. Lecturers need to regularly update their knowledge, improve their professional skills and make relevant professional contacts.
- e) Develop a system of checking, evaluating, and verifying the quality of social work training in the hospital. Promoting inter-ministerial cooperation (Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Labor, Invalids, Social Affairs, and Ministry of Health), uniformly develop an international standard assessment set for hospital social work, with appropriate contents meeting the practical requirements of the hospital social work profession, comparing compatibility with some countries in the region and around the world. This is also the basis for hospitals to recruit hospital social workers specialized in social work [14].

## 2. Conclusion

Social work in the healthcare and healthcare sectors is extremely necessary not only in high demand in quantity but also in high professional qualifications. Therefore, the social

work training working in the hospital sector needs to be closely combined with the social work expertise and certain medical knowledge, without either of the above conditions, one can't become a professional social work officer in the health and health care field.

The social worker in the health industry can connect patients with a wide variety of services and professional program in the community, in fact, has identified the essential needs of social work activities and the responsibility of social workers in the health sector. It can be said that social work is really an urgent need in the health sector. The birth and application of the social work profession in hospitals is inevitable salvation for current hospitals in terms of social activities and needs to be concerned by the whole society.

Currently, with overloading hospitals in Vietnam, heavy work pressure on physicians, has had a great impact on the process of medical examination and treatment for the people, with the participation of a social worker or a well-equipped health worker with social work skills will increase patient satisfaction, make them comply with the treatment and the quality of medical examination and treatment will be increased. It can be said that, if social work is good, it will contribute to improving the medical ethics of physicians. However, the current training activities are not formal because the social workers at the hospital have not been trained and professionally skilled in social work.

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The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

### 4. Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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