SOCIAL WORK IN AGING
YOUR KEY TO BETTER HEALTH

Social workers play a critical role in the support of aging well. Whether in hospitals, clinics, or in community settings, social workers support people's independence, autonomy, and safety. Social workers provide a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted concerns facing older adults, assisting with concrete services, linking people to needed resources, and providing skilled mental health support. With expertise in navigating complex systems, social workers are leaders in the aging services network and conduct local and national advocacy work. This collaborative team approach is essential for the provision of person- and family-centered, culturally congruent, quality care – and is **key to better health**.

Social workers **promote health** and **enhance hope** by providing individualized support, education, and counseling to older adults and their families by:

- **Assessing** biopsychosocial, spiritual, and environmental factors to identify strengths and resource needs
- **Providing** evidence-informed interventions to enhance support and well-being
- **Negotiating** transitions in care
- **Balancing** patient and family preferences with risk, safety, frailty, and function
- **Convening** family meetings to aid in understanding illness and care options
- **Coordinating** social, emotional, and direct care services
- **Advocating** for policies that support healthy aging
- **Studying** the impact of aging on diverse communities
- **Confronting** social drivers of health and other barriers to care
- **Collaborating** with team members to address patient and family needs

Social workers enable healthcare providers to focus on what they do best while working to ensure that people get what is needed for healthy aging. Committed to social justice, social workers **improve healthcare outcomes** by aligning care to patient needs and preferences which reduces unnecessary expenditures and overtreatment, increases patient satisfaction, and mitigates disparities.

Social Work in Action:
Ms. Ramirez (age 83) has been active in her community all of her life. Newly diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, and a widower with adult children living out of state, she is aware that she will need additional assistance if she is to remain safely in her home. Reviewing her limited resources, the health social worker at her clinic referred her to the Program of All Inclusive Care of the Elderly (PACE). Ms. Ramirez met with their interprofessional team to co-create a plan of care that best meets her needs. The PACE social worker arranged a family meeting to ensure that her children were informed of their services and provided anticipatory guidance regarding what to expect as her illness progresses. Her family was relieved that Ms. Ramirez could receive this support within her home.

References:

- PACE Benefits: https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/long-term-services-supports/pace/programs-all-inclusive-care-elderly-benefits/index.htm
- National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Social work in long-term care and aging: Decreased health care costs, increased quality of life*. National Association of Social Workers. https://www.socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=WLe4RjXa8KA%3D&portalid=0

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