SOCIAL WORK IN SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: YOUR KEY TO BETTER HEALTH

Social workers play a critical role supporting people coping with sexual and reproductive health concerns. Whether in hospitals, clinics, or in community settings, social workers support people's independence, autonomy, and safety. They provide a comprehensive perspective addressing the multifaceted concerns related to fertility support, gender identity, pregnancy loss, sexual functioning, menopause, and issues associated with sexual trauma and healing. Social workers assist with concrete services, linking people to needed resources, and providing skilled mental health support while negotiating complex systems and participating in national advocacy work. This collaborative 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 people by:

- **Completing** biopsychosocial, spiritual, and environmental assessments to identify strengths and resource needs
- **Providing** evidence-informed interventions to enhance support and well-being
- **Navigating** transitions in sexual health across the life span
- **Understanding** patient and family preferences
- **Convening** family meetings to aid in understanding treatment options
- **Coordinating** social, emotional, and direct services
- **Advocating** for policies that support sexual and reproductive health
- **Studying** the impact of disparities in services on diverse communities
- **Addressing** 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 to maximize sexual and reproductive health. Committed to social justice and advocacy, social workers **improve healthcare outcomes** by aligning care to patient needs and preferences to facilitate access, increase patient satisfaction, and mitigate disparities.

Social Work in Action:
Sarah Yu is a social worker at a rural health clinic. Patients are referred based upon a standardized screening protocol that identifies concerns with coping and social drivers of health. This morning, she is meeting with a young woman with a history of sexual trauma, who is being evaluated for fertility support following a recent diagnosis of breast cancer. Sarah is then scheduled to see Ryan, who is struggling with food insecurity and grieving a recent pregnancy loss. Later, she will meet with a young person who is questioning their gender identity, and then counsel a couple who received an in utero genetic diagnosis. Finally, she will provide support to a woman who is perimenopausal and experiencing sexual discomfort impacting her sexual functioning.

References:

- Liddel, J.L. (2019). Reproductive Justice and the Social Work Profession: Common Grounds and Current Trends. Affilia, SAGE (34):1, 99-115 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0886109918803646?journalCode=affa

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