The Social Worker’s Role in Hospice Care

Hospice Social Workers: The Core of Whole-Patient Care

Hospice and palliative care are crucial to families and patients coping with the dying process. During their end of life, your loved-one should not be in pain: your loved-one should feel mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually whole. Hospice care, a subset of palliative care which serves to relieve pain, specifically tends to those who have six months or less to live. Choosing hospice care for yourself or a loved-one is an incredibly daunting, and emotionally-taxing, task. You want to ensure the care received is respectful, treating all of the patient with tailored care.

To ensure your wishes are heard, and your needs are directly cared-for and adequately represented, you will want to be perfectly matched with the right hospice social worker. Hospice social workers play many roles, the most important of which is patient advocate. Hospice social workers care for, and represent, both the patient and the family throughout the dying process, even assisting with bereavement after the loved-one has passed. Hospice social workers work to stabilize and increase the patient’s physical comfort, emotional comfort, mental state, spiritual state, and social stimulation. Hospice social workers intimately tailor their services to provide the most effective and comprehensive care.
Hospice Social Workers: Defending All Needs of the Patient

Hospice social workers strive to intimately understand all of their patient’s needs and desires, as well as the needs and desires of the family. They will conduct a gentle psychosocial evaluation in order to determine the best care to provide the patient in order to increase quality of life and foster a positive environment. Hospice social workers assess the “big picture,” understanding all family dynamics and how they influence the patient’s mental, emotional, and social state, as well as how they influence the family’s coping process. Some of the “big picture” dynamics the hospice social worker will take into account are: financial burdens, emotional tensions, spiritual conflicts, and depression. By profoundly understanding the patient’s needs, the patient’s wishes, the family’s wishes, and the family dynamic, hospice social workers can provide any necessary extra support customized to provide relief to all involved.

Throughout the extent of hospice care, the hospice social worker will actively advocate for the needs of the patient and family. Hospice social workers have extensive experience and training in pharmacological matters, and are familiar with all relevant medical terminologies. Hospice social workers can help the patient and family understand upcoming treatments or care options by skillfully translating medical jargon and providing a grounded insight. Hospice social workers also educate the other members of the hospice care team on the patient’s psychological, social, and spiritual states and circumstances. With their detailed understanding of the patient’s needs, hospice social workers provide the hospice care team a rounded understanding patient’s quality of life, promoting more tailored treatments.
Hospice Social Workers: Care Beyond the End-of-Life

Hospice social workers not only ensure all treatments fulfill the needs and wishes of both the patient and the family, they also provide advance care planning, and assistance with funeral planning and legal documentation. Hospice social workers can also help relieve financial stressors that so many experience during the end of life—their knowledge of financial resources can provide guidance on medical costs, insurance coverage, accessing disability income, or any relevant bills.

Hospice social workers defend the needs, wishes, and rights, of the patient and family during all stages of the dying process. They will tend to you or your loved-one in-home or inpatient settings, while also providing off-hours emergency care. Your hospice social worker is your protective shadow, observing your wants and needs while also providing patient advocacy. Hospice social workers do not stop caring for the family once the loved-one has passed: hospice social workers provide bereavement counseling and care services to the family during the grieving process. Having intimately experienced the dying process with you and your loved-one, your hospice social worker can give you the most profound and understanding bereavement services. Hospice social workers care for the family after the loss of a loved-one, providing relief for the overwhelming imposition of grief and preventing the development of depression.

Questions to Ask Your Potential
Hospice Social Worker

When choosing a hospice care social worker, there are several questions you can ask to ensure that you or your loved-one is perfectly matched with the right hospice social worker. The answer to these four questions can help flesh-out the kind of caregiver, and person, your potential social worker is.

What previous hospice social work experience have you had that specifically relates to my/my loved-one’s situation?

When your hospice social worker has skills and experience particularly related to your needs and situation, they can provide the most comprehensive knowledgeable care services.

In the last year, what personal development and professional development have you undertaken that is connected to hospice social work?

Knowing any extra or recent training your potential social worker has undertaken can help you to better understand their particular strengths and weaknesses. This question also helps you understand the ways in which the potential hospice social worker values their job, how they view their service, and their desire to provide the best care possible.

How do you work under pressure?

Hearing how your potential hospice social worker copes with stress, pressure, and familial conflict, can help you understand their character. You may want to ask for a specific obstacle they had to overcome in order to best illustrate their process of conflict resolution. They also may share with you how they reduce stress and avoid burnout in order to help
you gain a better understanding of their coping strategies. Your hospice social worker should be a source of stability throughout the dying process and the grieving process.

**Tell us about yourself.**

You want to make sure your hospice social worker is compatible. You or your-loved one should feel connected with the hospice social worker. Your hospice social worker should be open, willing to communicate, kind, and respectful. When your hospice social worker talks about themselves, do your best to gauge their personality and values and make sure they align with yours.