VA Social Workers Collaborate to Improve Care for Veterans with Multiple Sclerosis

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VA Care Management and Social Work Service
Care and Compassion across the Continuum

Introduction

In 2011, the Veterans Affairs Multiple Sclerosis Centers of Excellence (MSCOE) developed and implemented the first VA MS Handbook of best practices, standards, and procedures for developing multi-disciplinary MS Care Teams across the national VA healthcare system, including social workers as key team members and leaders for MS care. In October 2011, the VA Social Workers furthered their role by developing the first VA MS Social Worker Collaborative to strengthen and promote awareness of the MS Social Worker as a key player on the VA MS Care Team.

History

Social Workers have been "conductors" leading the way addressing our nation’s social problems and raising public awareness since the first Social Work class was offered at Columbia University in 1898. In 1928, the Veterans Bureau General Order established the Social Work program in the Veterans Bureau, and hired 36 social workers.

Today, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) employs over 8,000 Master’s level Social Workers.

In the new millennium, our mission has not been deserted - Social Workers are on track to deliver specialized MS services and on board with allied MS healthcare professionals to deliver compassionate and competent care to more than 16,000 military Veterans with MS in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Health Care System.

Hub & Spokes Model

VA MS & SCI/D

Many Veterans get MS care in the VA SCI/D system of care, also based on the Hub and Spoke Model of care. The Hub is generally Polytrauma Centers centrally located within the VA System. The SCI Center serves as the Hub. The SCI Primary Care Clinic is generally located closer to the Veteran's home and serves as the Spoke. The SCI Coordinator, a Social Worker, is assigned to the SCI Spoke.

Veterans with MS are referred to other specialty clinics for their specialized individual needs: e.g., Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Neurology, Home Care, Recreational Therapy, Psychology, Mental Health, Blind Rehab, Speech Therapy, etc.

Veterans & MS Social Work

As a MS Team member, Social Workers play a myriad of roles unique to the social work profession including the "person in environment" perspective which is relationship-centered and recognizes each person's developmental and social functioning abilities in the context of environmental influences.

The MS Handbook states that Veterans with MS must have access to comprehensive social work services throughout the course of their illness. Social work services are an integral part of the overall VHA health care program and the MS Continuum of Care.

Because MS related disability often strikes in the early adult years, there are frequently acute occupational, home and family issues to address.

VA MS Social Work Collaborative

As a development within the collaborative role of the VA MS Social Work, the VA MS Social Work Collaborative (VA MSSWC) provides unique infrastructures and resources for MS Social Workers to network on a national level and expand their knowledge of biopsychosocial, cross-cultural, and Veteran-specific issues.

The VA MSSWC provides more structure and support to VA MS Social Workers by creating a VA Social Worker Collaborative including:
1) Established quarterly conference calls.
2) Established a membership email list.
3) Shared resources and educational opportunities.
4) Established a study group for the MS Certified Specialist (MSCS) credential.
5) Established working group for developing national conference presentations and posters.
6) Presenting first poster at CMSIC Annual Meeting, June 2012.
7) Presenting at Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Summit Sept 2012.

Future

Long-Term Goals

VA MSSWC will continue to develop MS-Specialized Social Work services for Veterans with MS. Knowing that social work is on the board, equipped with the tools of our profession, we will go the distance until a cure is found. Long-term goals include:
1) Develop more MS Social Worker positions VA-wide.
2) Develop MS social work-specific CEU courses and workshops with MSCOE education team.
3) Develop social work-oriented content for MSCOE website.
4) Present provider/patient educational programs.
5) Develop presentations and posters for national MS conferences and professional publications.

VA MSSWC Coordinating Center
VA MSCOE East Regional Hub Site
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