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## Policies in Hospital Social Work

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# Policies in Hospital Social Work

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## Agency Introduction

Mayo Clinic Health Systems is a regional health system comprised of several sites. Currently, there are 30 social workers that work in Mankato, Fairmont, New Prague, St. James, Waseca and Springfield. There are 25 social workers located at the Mankato site and there is one social worker located at each of the other five sites. The role of the Social Services Department in the Southwest Region is to assess psychological functioning and needs of the patients and families. The Social Services Department assists with completing behavioral health assessments, chemical dependency assessments, crisis intervention, emotional support, coordination of care, and providing community resources.

## Purpose

The goal of this project was to create an environment that provides a professional standard of care to ensure patient safety. This project will address the absence of policies in the Social Service Department at Mayo Clinic Health System, Southwest Region. A standard of care is a detailed standardized model of an intervention process that discusses the goals, objectives, settings, process, procedures and interventions (Gayle, 2005). Policy development must occur to assure that patients with social service needs are being identified appropriately and are being provided necessary interventions to meet their needs (Gordon & Rehms, 1969). The project also identified the need for specific policies within the Social Service Department and this will be supported by a literature review compiled of evidence-based best practices.

## Methodology

The project focuses on different approaches when it comes to determining appropriateness of policies along with deferent techniques used to write effective policies. Specific policies were researched to make sure that the policies meet the guidelines for Mayo Clinic Health System, Southwest Region as well as federal and state guidelines for appropriate professional practice. The basic steps that were considered when creating policies included, determining the objectives of the policies, selecting meaningful titles, assessing the needs of the specific department, concise and simplistic writing, appropriate length, and understand the policy that is being developed (Miller, 1985). It was also important to proofread the policies, avoid the use of long words, use of the present tense for procedures and avoid passive verbs (Goldfarb, 1981). The writing of the policies was just as important as the policies themselves. According to the Goldfarb, if the policies are too long and hard for people to understand, the policies will not be followed (1981). It was also important to have more than one person review the policy being created as many people may have different viewpoints of the policies (Goldfarb, 1981). The outline of the policies that were written includes the purpose of the policy, definition of the policy, policy statement and procedure statements. Those areas were addressed with all of the department policies.

### **New Employee Orientation Policy**

Purpose: To orient new social workers to the specific department, department procedures, standards of practice, and resources as well as to introduce other colleagues aside from the general orientation provided by Human Resources.

### **Clinical Supervision Policy**

Purpose: To provide guidance for clinical social work practice in the Mayo setting. Clinical supervision will follow the standards of the Minnesota Board of Social Work. Supervision will be obtained by individuals working within the department. Staff members are not allowed to seek supervision outside of the Mayo Clinic Health System social service department.

### **Trip Policy**

Purpose: Describes the approval process for staff requesting Mayo Clinic Health System resources to attend continuing education credits. The main idea behind this policy is to promote and further develop the individual's competency and clarify how the Mayo Clinic Health System supports employees.

### **Coverage Policy**

Purpose: Outlines the general coverage guidelines for the social workers if they have an unplanned or planned absence from work. This policy will assist with determining the appropriate covering strategies for the individual who is absent.

### **Documentation Policy**

Purpose: Describes the social service department's assessment and care planning of patient care needs across the continuum of care. Also used to create a standard documentation forum for the social workers to follow. This will increase the social workers reliability and accountability with documentation and continued patient care.

## Outcome

After the policies were written, they were reviewed by the Social Service Director at Mayo Clinic Health System, Mankato. The policies were then presented to the Mayo Clinic Health System, Southwest Region Social Service Department staff meeting to get the input. The feedback from the director and social workers in the department was beneficial to discuss how realistic the policies were as well as where the social workers can find the policies to refer back to.

The policies were updated and resubmit to the Director of the Social Service Department. The updated policies were approved and placed on the Mayo Clinic Health System website.

## Implications

- The policies will help individuals know when to contact the hospital social worker and when some situations could be handled by other staff members. That being said, change in smaller communities is difficult. A majority of the areas within the Southwest Region are rural towns and smaller communities. By defining the roles of the social worker, it will make it easier for the social workers and other staff members to understand the roles of a hospital social worker.
- Increased tasks and responsibilities to complete along with the social workers high census (patient list) due to the increased documentation standards. There will also be an adjustment period of the new task that is expected of the social workers in the Social Service Department.
- Increased time spent on documentation and decreased time spent with patients.

## Benefits

By having specific policies for the social service department, it will be easier to fully meet the needs of the community. Structural changes are needed to assure that patients with social service needs are being identified appropriately and are being provided necessary interventions to meet their needs (Gordon & Rehms, 1969). Established policies will increase the level of competence and will standardize the role of the social worker in the hospital setting (Callahan, 1996).

## References

References available upon request

