

Qualitative Study Method on Case Assignment Adopted by Singapore Medical Social Workers

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Abstract : Case assignment systems are created to meet a need for equity in work distribution and better match between medical social workers' (MSWs) competencies and patients' problems. However, there is no known study that has explored how MSWs in Singapore assign cases to achieve equity in work distribution. Focus group discussions were conducted with MSWs from public hospitals to understand their perception on equitable workload and case allocation. Three approaches to case allocation were found. First is the point system where points are allocated to cases based on a checklist of presenting issues identified most of the time by non-MSWs. Intensity of case is taken into consideration, but allocation of points is often subject to variation in appreciation of roles of MSWs by the source of referral. Second is the round robin system, where all MSWs are allocated cases based on a roster. This approach resulted in perceived equity due to element of luck, but it does not match case complexity with competencies of MSWs. Third approach is unit-based allocation, where MSWs are assigned to attend to cases from specific unit. This approach helps facilitate specialization among MSWs but may result in MSWs having difficulty providing transdisciplinary care due to narrow set of knowledge and skills. Trade-offs resulted across existing approaches for case allocation by MSWs. Conversations are needed among Singapore MSWs to decide on a case allocation system that comes with trade-offs that are acceptable for patients and other key stakeholders of the care delivery system.

Keywords : case allocation, equity, medical social worker, work distribution

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