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Medical Social Workers: How Can They Benefit Me?

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Medical social workers are licensed professionals who have received a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and have completed a state licensing exam. Depending on the medical facility where they are employed, social workers may also be referred to as care coordinators, case managers, or discharge planners.

Medical social workers are a vital part of an interdisciplinary team in hospitals, rehab facilities, nursing homes and numerous other facilities. They provide benefits to many, if not all, patients who are receiving medical care in an inpatient facility. They do this by serving as advocates who assess patient/family needs and communicate these needs to other members of the health care team, including doctors, nurses, therapists, chaplains and various other team members. To put it simply, social workers serve as a voice for their patients. By effectively communicating with other health care staff, social workers can ensure that a safe plan of care, or discharge plan, is put into place once a patient is ready for discharge from a medical facility. A plan of care could include arranging post hospital care such as home health care or connecting the patient and family to their community through other community agencies.

Social workers are also available to provide various health care resources and education to patients and families on how social, cultural, and religious variables can affect patient plan of care and recovery. Social workers help patients and families cope with and understand implications of diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions that may impact the patient and their families through the healing process. All hospitals, rehabs, and skilled facilities have social workers/discharge planners on staff to assist you. If your health care team decides you are safe to discharge home, your social worker can discuss home health care options with you and provide choices of agencies as part of a safe discharge plan. Once you have discussed options for home health agencies, your social worker will make a referral to an agency that will best serve the needs of yourself or your loved one. If you or your loved one is receiving medical care in a hospital or rehab facility and you need assistance or simply do not know who to turn to for help, just ask to speak with your social worker!