

The role of the social worker with an autistic patient

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Abstract:

The research addresses the role of social workers in dealing with the challenges associated with autism and how they support individuals and families affected by this disorder. The research explains how social workers collect the patient's personal and medical information and assess his psychological and behavioral condition, with the aim of developing treatment plans in cooperation with the medical team to ensure the achievement of the patient's short- and long-term goals. The research also addresses how to provide continuous support to families by building trust, providing education and training, and supporting them psychologically and emotionally.

The research also reviews the development of the use of modern technologies in the treatment of autism, such as digital therapeutic applications, wearable devices, and virtual and augmented reality technology. These technologies contribute to improving the communication and behavioral skills of individuals with autism and help monitor their progress and modify treatment plans accordingly.

Furthermore, the research discusses strategies for dealing with autism, pointing to the importance of specialized training and increasing awareness of the disorder among social workers. It also highlights the need to develop self-efficacy among social workers to enable them to apply knowledge and skills in their professional practice, especially when dealing with vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. Finally, the research points to the challenges facing these groups in obtaining appropriate diagnosis and treatment for autism, and how social workers can contribute to overcoming these obstacles through early intervention and referral for necessary medical assessments.

Introduction :

Many social workers have participated in all kinds of community events throughout the years. Social workers have taken the initiative in some of these cases, but the government has not always supported them. In July 2014, the social work profession was defined as an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. This definition was reached after the need to clearly define the role of social workers was recognized at the international federation of social workers (IFSW) general meeting and the IASSW general assembly. Working to alleviate poverty, oppression, and ensure that all people have access to basic necessities is central to social work's mission to improve people's quality of life. The field's overarching goal is to engage individuals across all tiers, frameworks, and systems. When it comes to helping people, families, and communities, social workers have a profound impact. Therefore, social workers may and should play a significant role in disability care, as changing people's perceptions of impairment is an important step in this direction (Muskat et al.,2015).

Disabilities in social interaction, repetitive behaviors, verbal or nonverbal communication, and overall neurodevelopmentality define autism spectrum disease (ASD). Individuals on the autism spectrum have a unique perspective on life because of this disorder. Every person with autism is unique, and the severity of their symptoms can vary greatly. People with autism cannot have their potential recognized if they are seen as having a limitation. People on the autism spectrum, like those with other developmental impairments, are living longer, becoming older, and developing many of the health issues experienced by the neuro-typical aging population. This means that healthcare consumption by this demographic is on the rise with the prevalence of autism. Because autistic people may have social obstacles that impact their health, it is important to address these disabilities in order to resolve autistic people's health demands. It is the responsibility of social workers to address these societal issues (Morris et al.,2019).

There are a variety of ways in which social workers handle the challenges associated with autism. The person-in-environment method is one tool social workers use to help autistic people and their families. Understanding a person and their behavior in relation to their environment is crucial in social work. This

is demonstrated by the person-in-environment view, a practice-guiding philosophy that takes into account the individual's living and interacting situation (Unigwe et al.,2017).

1- Treatment plan with doctors:

The initial assessment is the first essential step in the role of the social worker with a patient with autism. The social worker begins by collecting personal information about the patient, including age, family background, and medical history. This is done through comprehensive forms or interviews with the patient and his family. In addition, the specialist conducts a psychological and behavioral assessment to identify the strengths and challenges facing the patient, such as his behaviors, social abilities, and communication skills. The specialist also interacts with the family, holding listening sessions to understand their experiences, challenges, and expectations of treatment. During these sessions, the specialist provides basic information about autism and possible treatment plans, which helps the family adapt to the situation and understand what to expect (Oakley et al.,2021).

Developing a treatment plan includes several main steps. First, the social worker works to determine the patient's short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals may include improving simple communication skills, while long-term goals may include enhancing independence and social skills. After goals are identified, the social worker works with the healthcare team, including physicians and psychologists, to organize meetings and coordinate care. Appropriate interventions, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, educational interventions, and occupational therapy, are selected to ensure that the patient's needs are met. The treatment plan also includes incorporating various therapies such as educational support, behavioral interventions, and social services to provide comprehensive care (Hirota ,2023).

Implementing the treatment plan involves implementing the therapeutic interventions according to the agreed-upon plan. The social worker begins implementing the therapeutic strategies and training the family on how to support the patient at home. Periodic follow-up sessions are held to review the patient's progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Based on these reviews, goals and interventions are modified as needed to ensure the patient's continued progress and improvement.

Providing ongoing support is an essential component of the social worker's role. The social worker

provides ongoing support and guidance to the family, including organizing training workshops on coping strategies for the patient. The social worker also assesses changes in the patient's condition and adapts to any changes in circumstances. If necessary, the treatment plan is updated based on assessment feedback and new developments to ensure an effective response to the patient's changing needs (DePape et al.,2015).

Crisis intervention requires the social worker to respond quickly to emergencies or crises. A clear plan is developed for rapid response and immediate support to the patient and family when needed. This includes recording all emergencies and actions taken and evaluating the effectiveness of the response to provide ongoing improvements in crisis management.

2- How to deal with the patient's family:

Social workers are essential members of interdisciplinary health service teams, and they frequently interact with families, treating both children and their parents in a variety of contexts, including healthcare, education, and rehabilitation. Health institutions, families, and individuals all have a role in shaping care, and social workers are prepared to navigate these interdependent interactions from a socio-ecological stance that prioritizes people and their contexts. Social workers collaborate with a wide variety of intervention stakeholders, such as educational and institutional teams, to support individuals and their families in claiming their community rights, even though medical professionals and psychologists usually describe ASD as a neurodevelopmental disorder. Improving their ability to deal with developmental abnormalities is the goal of this procedure, which seeks to maximize the use of local resources. They may help with screenings and assessments, collaborate with other specialists, manage patients' cases, and even lobby for legislative changes (Pepperell et al.,2018).

Building trust and communication is the basis for effective dealing with the patient's family. The social worker should start building a positive relationship with the family by listening sincerely and showing empathy. Showing understanding of the family's feelings and challenges enhances trust and encourages them to speak openly. It is also essential for the specialist to use clear and direct communication

methods, explaining the details of the treatment plan, goals and expectations. Regular communication with the family helps reduce anxiety and stress, and ensures that they are aware of every step in the treatment process.

Providing education and guidance is an essential part of the social worker's role. Comprehensive information about autism and how it affects the patient's life should be provided. This includes explaining symptoms, coping strategies and available treatment options. In addition, the social worker should train the family on effective support strategies, and teach them how to deal with the patient's behaviors and use treatment techniques at home. This training enables the family to provide appropriate support and enhances their ability to cope with daily challenges (Courcy et al.,2017).

Supporting the family emotionally and psychologically is an important component of caregiving. The social worker must be sensitive to the emotional needs of the family and provide appropriate support to help them cope with psychological stress. Listening to the family's feelings and concerns and providing emotional support helps relieve stress and enhances their ability to cope with challenges. The family should also be encouraged to take care of themselves and seek out emotional support resources if needed.

Promoting collaboration and participation is vital in the treatment plan. It is important to involve the family in developing and reviewing the treatment plan to ensure their full commitment. Effective collaboration enhances the success of treatment and makes the family part of the care team. Clarifying roles and responsibilities helps the family understand what is expected of them and contributes to achieving treatment goals effectively (Ahlers et al.,2017).

Providing additional resources and support helps enhance the family's ability to meet the patient's needs. The social worker can direct the family to local resources such as support groups, community services, and non-profit organizations. Supporting the family in applying for and taking advantage of various services such as special education, health care, and financial support programs enhances their ability to provide appropriate care for the patient.

Dealing with crises requires rapid and effective preparation. In emergency or crisis situations, the social

worker must provide immediate support to the family, including counseling and organizing rapid interventions. After the crisis, it is important to follow up with the family to ensure the situation is stable and provide ongoing support to ensure their condition continues to improve (Frye,2016).

3- How modern treatment methods with technologies and devices:

Social workers play an essential role in helping families and individuals with autism spectrum disorder. However, much research on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has concentrated on those working in the fields of medicine and education. Social workers refer children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to suitable specialized services, as well as provide counseling and assistance in navigating the complex service delivery system and bureaucracy, as part of their services for individuals with neurodevelopmental disabilities. Social workers, then, need to be well-versed on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) history and symptoms, relevant legislation and policy, and effective interventions for ASD families.

Digital technologies and cognitive behavioral therapy have witnessed great development in treating patients with autism. Digital therapeutic applications and programs are an effective tool to support cognitive behavioral therapy. These applications provide interactive exercises and training tasks aimed at improving communication skills and social behaviors. They can be used to help the patient learn new strategies and interact with educational content customized according to their individual needs. These technologies also allow tracking the patient's progress and analyzing their data continuously, which helps in modifying the treatment plan in line with new developments (Mercer ,2017).

Wearable devices and wearable technology have become part of modern treatment strategies. These devices include smart watches and bracelets that measure activity levels, sleep, and blood pressure. They are used to monitor the patient's responses and provide accurate data about their health and behavioral condition. Some of these devices are equipped with technologies to stimulate positive behaviors through reminders and alerts, which enhances their ability to adhere to the treatment plan and achieve goals (Ang et al.,2019).

Virtual reality and augmented reality have become prominent in the treatment of autism. Virtual reality technologies are used to create simulated environments that the patient can interact with in a safe and controlled environment. This simulated environment can help train the patient in social skills and communication through multiple interactive experiences. Augmented reality can integrate digital information with the real world, helping the patient improve his ability to deal with real-life situations by providing visual and auditory cues.

Assistive communication technology has advanced significantly, and tools such as electronic boards, tablets, and interactive programs are essential to help improve communication in patients with autism. These devices help convert thoughts and feelings into messages that can be expressed visually or audibly, which contributes to improving the patient's ability to express himself and understand others. Text-to-speech programs and adaptive communication devices provide the patient with alternative means of communication that suit his needs (Ang et al.,2019).

Interventions based on applied behavioral analysis (ABA) involve the use of modern technologies to collect and analyze data. Interventions are based on the principles of behavioral analysis and use advanced technologies to monitor and modify the patient's behavior. The use of electronic programs and tools to analyze behaviors and monitor responses allows for the implementation of behavior modification strategies more effectively. Data is also used to improve the effectiveness of interventions and tailor them to the individual patient's needs.

Daily living skills training using modern technologies, such as educational apps and smart devices, has become more accessible. These technologies provide interactive learning tools to help patients develop daily living skills, such as time management, organization, and social skills. Personalized training programs help patients learn essential skills and improve their independence through hands-on, fun learning experiences (DePape et al.,2015).

4- Strategies for dealing with autism:

Some of the factors that contribute to social workers' awareness of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) include specialized training, recent experience treating ASD, and acquaintanceship with someone with

autism. There is a paucity of specific instruction on ASD symptoms in the social work qualifying courses, despite the fact that social workers have extensive training in conducting psychosocial assessments. Training and continuing education for licensed social workers can range from optional to required and can include a wide range of topics. Therefore, meaningful information is mostly the product of individual efforts that are self-directed and may be motivated by many factors (Unigwe et al.,2017). When it comes to putting one's knowledge and abilities to use in one's work, professional self-efficacy is crucial. A person's self-efficacy may be defined as their confidence in their own abilities to carry out a certain action or activity. The importance of self-efficacy in professionals' ability to apply knowledge and skills has been highlighted in research conducted outside of the disability sector. Anxieties over potential delays in diagnosis and insufficient referral to targeted interventions may stem from allied pediatric healthcare providers' skewed perceptions of their own clinical competence, as shown in prior research that looked at the correlation between ASD knowledge and self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of social workers in relation to ASD has been the subject of very no research. According to the accounts given by social workers working in pediatric hospitals, families whose children have autism spectrum disorder often feel confused and unsure about what to do next. Families from low socioeconomic status (SES), immigrants, and minority groups are among those that social workers actively seek out and aid. New research from throughout the world shows that certain populations face extra hurdles when trying to get the help they need for autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These obstacles may reduce the efficacy of health and associated services and lead to a reduced incidence of ASD diagnosis coming at comparatively later ages. By virtue of their privileged position, social workers are skilled at interacting with people from all walks of life; this enables them to screen children for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in their early stages, refer them to medical evaluations, guide them toward developmental, psychological, and physical health interventions, and ultimately offer therapy. The level of social workers' understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been a mystery up until this point, despite the fact that ASD-specific information is a key component in bridging societal and cultural gaps (Reinke,2015).

Autism management strategies include a set of methods and techniques that aim to improve the quality of life of individuals with autism and enhance their ability to interact and adapt. The following are the most important strategies for dealing with autism in detail:

Applied behavioral analysis (ABA) is one of the leading methods in treating autism. This approach is based on the principles of behavioral analysis to modify behaviors through positive and negative reinforcement. ABA strategies are used to teach social and communication skills, and reduce unwanted behaviors. This treatment involves breaking down large tasks into small steps that can be easily learned, and providing immediate reinforcements to stimulate positive behaviors. This treatment can be implemented in various environments such as home and school, which enhances its effectiveness in improving the child's behavior and social skills (Fuld,2018).

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) is a strategy that aims to improve the communication skills of individuals with autism who have difficulties in verbal expression. This type of communication involves the use of assistive devices such as picture boards, tablets, and interactive software that converts text to speech. AAC techniques help individuals express their needs and thoughts more effectively, which enhances their ability to interact with others and reduces feelings of frustration.

Behavioral intervention therapy (CBT) is used to help individuals with autism cope with anxiety and behavioral problems. This therapy relies on therapeutic techniques that aim to modify negative thinking patterns and teach individuals effective coping strategies. CBT involves the use of techniques such as experiential learning, practical exercises, and relaxation techniques to help individuals manage their emotions and develop coping skills (Boujut et al.,2016).

Occupational therapy focuses on improving fine motor skills and executive functions. This therapy helps individuals improve their ability to perform daily activities such as writing, using tools, and managing time. Occupational therapy involves the use of strategies and exercises designed to enhance motor coordination and improve independence in daily activities, which contributes to improving the quality of life for individuals with autism.

Specialized educational interventions include educational strategies specifically designed to meet the

needs of individuals with autism. This includes the use of individualized educational programs, flexible educational techniques, and socially supportive educational strategies. Educational programs are designed to meet the specific needs of each child, helping to enhance their academic and social skills and promote their participation in the learning environment (Russa et al.,2015).

Play therapy is a method that uses interactive activities and play to improve communication and social interaction skills. This therapy provides a safe and fun environment that helps individuals with autism develop new skills and express themselves through play. Play therapy can include the use of educational games, group activities, and interactive experiences to stimulate learning and enhance social relationships.

Nutritional and nutritional interventions play an important role in managing autism symptoms. These strategies include providing a balanced and healthy diet that can help improve overall health and behavior. In some cases, dietary modifications such as reducing allergens or processed foods may be recommended to improve behavioral and health symptoms.

Family support strategies are essential in dealing with autism, as parents play a crucial role in supporting and guiding individuals with autism. These strategies include providing emotional support, providing training to parents on how to deal with the child's behaviors, and directing them to community and training resources. Enhancing communication between the family and the treatment team contributes to improving the effectiveness of treatment and ensuring comprehensive support (Lord et al.,2018).

5- Challenges and difficulties

Individuals with autism and their families face a set of challenges and difficulties that can affect their quality of life and affect their effectiveness in various fields. The following are the most important challenges and difficulties faced by individuals with autism:

Challenges in communication and social interaction: Many individuals with autism have difficulties with communication and social interaction skills. They may have difficulty understanding social cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice, making communicating with others a major challenge.

They may have difficulty starting or maintaining conversations, and lack the skills to read social

context, which affects their ability to build effective social relationships.

Difficulties in motor skills and coordination: Some individuals with autism have problems with fine and gross motor skills. They may have difficulty with motor coordination, such as writing or using tools effectively. These difficulties may affect their ability to perform simple daily activities such as eating or dressing, affecting their independence (Nicholas et al.,2016).

Behavioural problems and routines: Repetitive and routine behaviours are part of the nature of autism, but they can be a major challenge in a social setting. Individuals may display inappropriate behaviours such as excessive repetition of certain actions or impulsive behaviours, which can lead to difficulties interacting with others and affect their ability to adapt to changes in the environment.

Academic and learning challenges: Individuals with autism face academic challenges related to concentration and attention, and their ability to follow through on education. They may require specialised educational strategies and individualised support to meet their educational needs. Providing appropriate education may require the use of specialised teaching methods and the design of flexible educational programmes.

Difficulties managing emotions and anxiety: Individuals with autism may have difficulties managing their feelings and emotions, which can lead to increased levels of anxiety and stress. They may have difficulty identifying and expressing their feelings appropriately, which can affect their mental health and increase the likelihood of anxiety or depression (Unigwe et al.,2017).

Challenges in interacting with the physical environment: Individuals with autism may have difficulty coping with changes in their surroundings or adjusting to unfamiliar environmental conditions. New environments or excessive noise and light can be disruptive to them, leading them to avoid social situations or places where they feel uncomfortable.

Challenges in providing care and family support: Providing care for individuals with autism requires a significant amount of effort and time from the family. Parents may have difficulty managing the psychological and practical stresses associated with caring for an individual with autism. It can be difficult for them to obtain appropriate support and resources, which can lead to stress and pressure.

Discrimination and social stigma: Families and individuals with autism face challenges related to

discrimination and social stigma. They may be misunderstood and discriminated against by society, which can affect their quality of life and increase social isolation. Community awareness and education about autism are essential to reduce these difficulties and promote acceptance of individuals with autism in society (Kiami et al.,2017).

Conclusions:

Studies and data show that the social work profession has developed significantly, especially since 2014, when it was more clearly defined as an academic field focused on social change, development and social cohesion. This development reflects the increasing role played by the social work profession in improving the quality of life of individuals and communities, especially in dealing with issues such as poverty, oppression and ensuring access to basics. This role enhances the importance of social work as an essential tool in addressing social problems and promoting human development.

With regard to the care of individuals with autism, it is clear that social workers have a central role in this field. This role is represented in using methods such as "person in environment" to understand the needs and behavior of individuals in their environmental context. This method helps in providing customized and effective support in line with each individual's circumstances, which enhances the ability to provide appropriate care and achieve specific treatment goals.

Comprehensive treatment plans are an essential part of social workers' work with patients with autism. In collaboration with medical teams, social workers develop and implement individualized treatment plans that include goal setting, coordination between different physicians and therapists, and selection of appropriate interventions. These plans are reviewed and modified periodically to ensure that patients' needs are effectively and appropriately met.

The relationship with patients' families is another essential element of autism care. Social workers build trust and communication with families by listening, understanding, and providing necessary information and training. Supporting families emotionally and psychologically, and teaching them effective support strategies, enhances their ability to cope with daily challenges and provide the necessary care for their loved ones. Modern technology is an important part of treatment strategies. Digital applications, wearable devices, virtual reality, and augmented reality allow for improved communication and social behavior skills. These technologies help track patients' progress and modify treatment plans according to their individual needs, which contributes to improving the effectiveness of treatment and providing new tools to support patients.

Managing autism requires multiple strategies that include applied behavior analysis, assistive communication, cognitive behavioral therapy, occupational therapy, and other specialized approaches. These strategies aim to improve social and communication skills, manage behavioral problems, and promote independence in daily activities, which contributes to improving the quality of life of individuals with autism.

Individuals with autism and their families face multiple challenges including difficulties in communication and social interaction, problems with motor skills and coordination, and behavioral and academic problems. These challenges require integrated support from professionals, families, and the community to provide appropriate care and resources to deal with them.

Finally, the recommendations emphasize the importance of increasing awareness and education about autism, and improving social support and resources available to individuals and their families.

Promoting community acceptance and providing adequate support through community services and initiatives can contribute significantly to improving the quality of life of individuals with autism and promoting their inclusion in society.

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