

A Qualitative Exploration of Social Workers as Members of Burn Care Teams: Perspectives From the Field

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Introduction

Social workers as members of interprofessional teams are important in treating the psychosocial sequela of trauma and burn injuries. However, the specific skills needed and roles of social workers on treatment teams can be confusing and poorly articulated not only by medical providers, but even by social workers themselves. This qualitative study was designed to increase both the breadth and depth of knowledge related to social work practice on interprofessional burn care teams

Methods

Primarily qualitative methods were used to explore the roles of social workers employed on burn care teams. In addition to conducting individual interviews, brief surveys were collected from each of the social work participants ($n = 11$) focused on participant work environments and demographics. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to capture the perceptions of participants in their own words. Each interview was analyzed and coded using NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2018). Analysis applied grounded theory strategies for inductive thematic approaches.

Discussion

By gaining insight into the skills, barriers, and resources of social workers working in U.S. burn centers, treatment team members can better and more consistently understand, utilize, and support their current and/or incoming social workers. In addition, Master's level academic programs can better prepare new social workers in how to best assist burn survivors and their families at both the inpatient and community level. Content related to the needed competencies can be incorporated into required social work courses and medical social work electives

Implications for Practice

By establishing and teaching the requisite skills of burn center social work, Social Workers will be more effective to meet the broad psychosocial needs of patients, their families, and the other members of the interdisciplinary team. Social Work educators are an asset to prepare incoming and current social workers in the vital roles and skills necessary to be fully utilized and included as valued members of the burn care teams.

