

Social workers enhance the effectiveness of care teams

Recognizing that team-based care can lead to better outcomes for patients, many forward-thinking organizations like Rush are integrating social workers into their multidisciplinary care teams.

Robyn Golden, LCSW, chair of the Department of Social Work at CHS and associate vice president of social work and community health at Rush University Medical Center, says a social worker often takes on the role of an “empathy ambassador” on a care team. “We can help other providers understand the patient within the context of their life and history,” she says.

That’s exactly what Therese Byrne, LCSW, does as part of a care team for Rush@Home, a program that provides house calls to patients with complex medical needs further complicated by social issues, such as food insecurity, lack of transportation or limited family support.

As a social worker, Byrne helps the two physicians and the nurse practitioner on the Rush@Home team assess the home for factors that can impede a patient’s care and develop collaborative solutions with the patient and family. “I see what needs to get done so that patients do not have barriers to their health care,” she says.

Rush@Home is just one example of how social workers can add value to the care team by doing what they are uniquely trained to do. “There are so many opportunities for us to partner even closer with our interdisciplinary team members,” says Elizabeth Cummings, MSW, LCSW, manager of clinical excellence and training in the Department of Social Work at CHS and the Department of Social Work and Community Health at Rush University Medical Center.

To make sure that future clinicians understand the value of this partnership, social workers help train Rush medical, nursing and allied health students as part of the

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university’s Interprofessional Education (IPE) coursework. Topics covered include administering social determinants of health screenings, responding to trauma disclosures and identifying what motivates clients to change.

This training helps students from multiple disciplines recognize that social workers enhance the effectiveness of the entire team by bringing a holistic view of the patient, says Eve Escalante, MSW, LCSW, manager of program innovation in the Department of Social Work and Community Health at Rush University Medical Center. “The future will be bright if we can have a social worker at every table,” Escalante says.



Therese Byrne, LCSW, makes a house call to a patient through Rush@Home.