

The role of social worker in team of rehabilitation: methodological approach

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Summary. This article introduces a new concept of a social worker role in rehabilitation team in Lithuania and presents a methodological approach for investigation of this role as well.

The goal of this study is to establish a standardized method for evaluation of social worker roles', significance for disabled people in a home-based rehabilitation setting, and to evaluate the most useful roles of social worker according to the needs of disabled people. The research method of this study was designed, based on a review of Lithuanian and foreign literature. Fifty (25 male, 25 female) disabled persons, who received home-based rehabilitation services, were observed and questioned according to this method. The results of the study show that the most important roles of a social worker in home-based rehabilitation are those of a broker, an enabler and a teacher.

Conclusion. It was discovered that there is a need for follow-up qualification program of social workers in a rehabilitation team in order to develop additional skills that correspond to the roles of a teacher, an enabler and a broker, with application of this method for home-based rehabilitation of disabled people.

Introduction

Teams that are formed in rehabilitation organizations provide rehabilitation services to persons with various disabilities (i.e. persons after a stroke, an infarct, various traumas such as spinal injuries, paralysis etc.). These teams tackle especially relevant problems of rehabilitation and integration into society for older people with several illnesses, as well as persons with disability who are of employable age. About 50% of disabled people in Lithuania are of employable age, 30% - under 45 years of age (1). According to the data of the National Socio-Medical Expertise Commission in 1995 there were 3,770 persons over 16 years of age, who received I group invalidity benefit for the first time, while in 2000 this number grew to 5,253 persons (2).

This growth in number of people with disability shows the need for help that society should provide for the disabled. One of the forms of such help (which is the object of this study) is home-based rehabilitation of disabled people. This form of help is provided by a team of specialists – rehabilitation physicians, caregivers, physiotherapists, psychologists, social

workers (SW), and other professionals, whose consultation is necessary based on the type of disability. "The mission of the social worker as a specialist is to strengthen a person's skills in adjusting to the environment, to rebuild a person's relations with community, while helping him/her to integrate into society, and promoting his/hers social functioning" (3). According to Bagdonas (2001) "Professional Profile of Social Worker" and "Qualification Requirements and the Order of Certification" that were approved by the Ministry of Social Security and Work indicate that SW has more functions than those stated in the law. In his opinion, "social work as a practical profession is probably as broad and multifunctional as medicine. The latter cures the body and rebuilds its functions, while social work deals with the social maladies of persons and small or large groups of persons (one can use this analogy with medicine even further by designating the term of social pathology to the deviations of a person's social functioning)" (4).

In Lithuania the concept of social work in rehabilitation teams is fairly new. In relation to this the administrators of rehabilitation organizations and the

leaders of rehabilitation teams face many questions: what SW roles are necessary in a home-based rehabilitation team for disabled people; do the services provided for disabled persons by a SW satisfy their need for social help; which roles of a SW are most significant in a rehabilitation team? Based on what the necessary roles of SW should be developed and trained? How can one examine the roles of SW?

In Lithuania many various opinions on what the role of SW should be exist and there's no dominating opinion on the subject. Therefore a scientific problem appeared in looking for a way to define the role of social worker in a home-based rehabilitation team because of the contradiction between two trends. One trend states that role of a social worker in a rehabilitation team should be defined based on the experience of European and American social workers, and the role of SW as it is described in Lithuanian legislation. The other trend is to consider the process of social change between SW and his/her client in particular, which in turn stipulates the roles of SW that correspond to the needs of the clients – disabled people.

The goal of this research is to develop a standardized method, which would be used to evaluate what roles of a social worker are significant in a home-based rehabilitation of disabled people, and to decide what roles of social worker closely correspond to the needs of a disabled person. This goal is realized by analyzing the particular tasks of the research: 1) to develop a research method, in order to find out what roles of SW are necessary and correspond to the needs of disabled people who use the services of home-based rehabilitation team; 2) to test the developed method and determine what roles of SW are necessary according to the social needs of disabled people.

Material and methods

It was noticed that the roles of SW in rehabilitation team are unclear and the clients do not always receive the basic social services that correspond to their needs based on the two years experience of a social worker in a home-based rehabilitation team for disabled people (Švedienė, Kerpė, Kurlys, Šitovienė, Sapežinskienė et al 1998 (5); Švedienė, Sapežinskienė, 1999 (6)). This was possible because a particular definition of the role of SW determines what social needs of a client in a particular social setting will be fulfilled. Payne (1991) (7) used the concept of construction of social reality by Berger and Luckman (1999) (8) and proposed that relation

between a social worker and his/her clients is constructed based on professional regulations of social work, which thus determine the process of social change which defines the specific roles of SW and his/her client. Lukoševičienė (1996) (9) as well as other specialists of social work were the first who tried to define the archetypal roles of SW in Lithuania. Later Jaskytė (1996) (10) found that the role of SW in Lithuanian society is still not understood/perceived. Gudėnaitė (1998) (11) emphasized that SW in a rehabilitation team acquires the role of a mediator. Šimkienė (1998) (12) noticed a negative societal attitude towards the roles of SW. Harison and Jagelavičius (1999) (13) described the role of SW as motivating and influencing the client to change during adaptation to a new social situation that results from illness or disability. Sapežinskienė (2000) (14) analyzed the roles of SW in home-based help for disabled people setting.

After studies of Lithuanian and foreign literature in order to further define and analyze the tasks of the research qualitative research method was chosen and research protocol was designed to examine the need of SW roles in rehabilitation team (Sapežinskienė, 2000). It consists of three parts: first part is development of the research instrument – protocol and questionnaire; second part is the research of client's opinion of social worker's roles using the developed method; and third part is evaluation of research results. Disabled persons who received the services of home-based rehabilitation team participated in the research using the SW role and activities research protocol (Sapežinskienė, 2000). The research data was gathered by using the phenomenological observation method and the researcher was a social work specialist. Effective cooperation between the researcher and the social work client was achieved by upholding ethical norms, values, and practical principles of social work. The researcher provided the client with information about the SW roles and activities and the client supplied information on which problems are significant for him/her, and what SW roles are necessary for him/her. The results were recorded by using social worker's role and activities research instrument (Table 1).

Results

The SW role in a rehabilitation team research method was used in order to analyze social situation in home-based rehabilitation of disabled people. Fifty respondents (25 male, 25 female) participated in the research. They were all adults who, who received

Table. SW role examination based on performed functions and strategies

B.C. Tracy and B. Dubois, (1987); K. Miley, M. O'Melia, B. Dubois, (1995) [15];

Adapted by L. Sapežinskienė (2000).

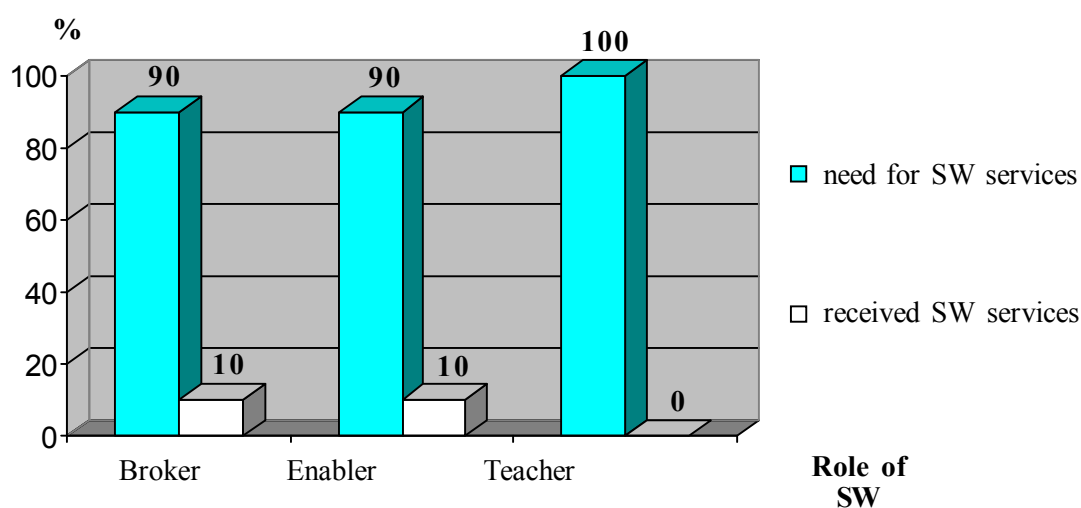
Function: consultative help in problem resolving			Received SW service	Did not receive SW service
Level	Role	Strategy		
Micro ¹	Enabler	Enables (sencourages and helps) client to solve problems independently		
Function: conducts resource management				
Micro	Broker (mediator, advocate/defender)	Mediates between the clients and resources, including the role of case manager ²		
Function: education				
Micro	Teacher	Provides necessary information, decides what clients need reeducation, organizes reeducation programs, supervises and conducts these programs		

¹level in social work practice means that SW works with individuals and families (16).

²Social case is an individual, a family, a group, an organization, or a community that has social functioning problems in a particular social setting. These social problems can be solved with the help of a social worker.

I group invalidity benefit for the first time in January–August, 1999 and agreed to participate in a home-based rehabilitation of disabled people program from September, 1999 to May, 2000. Fifteen of them were after hemiplegic stroke, 15 had multiple sclerosis, 20 were after spinal traumas or paralyzed. Some clients had several other illnesses. Mean age of the sample was 47.6 years. The research data analysis showed that the clients have previously received services that matched the role of a broker, which can be performed by a SW in a rehabilitation team.

The highest demand was for SW teacher role (Figure 1). Majority of disabled people did not know what service a SW can provide, and did not want an unfamiliar person to come into their home. All of the respondents lacked information on how they can obtain the services of a SW. Persons that belonged to the first invalidity group needed the services of various SW roles. Those that received the services of a rehabilitation team were not sure whether they were familiarized only with a small part of SW performed services. They did not always apprehend

**Figure. The need of disabled people for SW roles in a rehabilitation team**

what role a SW could perform in the process of their social rehabilitation.

Discussion

A method for examination of SW roles in a home-based rehabilitation of disabled people was designed and verified. After realization that the most significant SW roles were those of a broker, an enabler and a teacher, particular activities that correspond to each of these roles in a rehabilitation team were defined. A teacher is expected to provide information, educate, provide preventive care; broker is supposed to mediate, defend and advocate on the part of the client, as well as be a case manager; enabler has to consult, work as a clinical social worker. This method for examination of SW roles can be further applied in examining the change of opinions of disabled people as clients on the quality of service they receive from the SW. This method can also be used in other branches of social work in health care (i.e. in-patient rehabilitation, and rehabilitation in an ambulatory, or a sanatorium etc.)

Analysis of the research results shows that in Lithuania social work as a professional institution is not fully developed. In the Lithuanian Republic's legislation the roles and functions of a SW are described very generally and do not always correspond to particular social situations, i.e. home-

based rehabilitation setting. Health care agencies that provide home-based rehabilitation services do not have a uniform social work practice: there's a lack of SWs and variety of their roles that would guarantee provision of social services that satisfy the client's needs. This incongruity is constantly growing with an ever larger number of disabled persons and geriatric patients and their needs for social services performed by various SW roles.

A database for cataloging SW roles in rehabilitation team should be established. Various SW roles will be necessary depending on the process of social change between the clients i.e. disabled people and their social environment in particular. It is expedient to use the experience of European and American social work as additional, innovative information in this process.

Conclusions

1. A standardized method for researching social worker's roles was designed.

2. It was discovered that there's a need for follow-up qualification program of social workers in a rehabilitation team in order to develop additional skills that correspond to the roles of a teacher, an enabler and a broker, with application of this method for home-based rehabilitation of disabled people.

Socialinio darbuotojo vaidmuo reabilitacijos specialistų komandoje (tyrimo metodika)

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Raktažodžiai: socialinis darbuotojas, reabilitacijos specialistų komanda.

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje supažindinama su Lietuvoje nauja reabilitacijos specialistų komandos socialinio darbuotojo vaidmens samprata, taip pat pateikiama socialinio darbuotojo vaidmens tyrimo metodika. Šios studijos tikslas. Sukurti standartizuotą metodiką, kuria remiantis įvertintas socialinio darbuotojo vaidmuo reabilituojant neįgaliųjų žmonių namuose. Nustatyta, kokios socialinio darbuotojo paslaugos labiausiai atitinka neįgaliųjų poreikius. Tyrimo medžiaga ir metodai. Apžvelgus Lietuvos ir užsienio autorių mokslinius straipsnius, sukurta socialinio darbuotojo vaidmens tyrimo metodika, kuria remiantis parengtas specialus tyrimo protokolas. Apklausta 50 (25 vyrai, 25 moterys) neįgaliųjų pacientų, kuriems jų namuose buvo teikiamos reabilitacijos specialistų komandos paslaugos. Rezultatai. Nustatyta, kad tenkinant pacientų poreikius, labiausiai reikalingi socialiniai darbuotojai, galintys atlikti mokytojo, tarpininko, atliekančio advokato, gynėjo darbą, įgaliotojo vaidmenį.

Išvada. Reikalinga kelti reabilitacijos specialistų komandoje dirbančio socialinio darbuotojo kvalifikaciją ir tobulinti mokytojo, tarpininko, atliekančio advokato, gynėjo darbą, ir įgaliotojo vaidmenį.

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