

Enhancing Efficiency, Improving Care: Exploring Patient Opinions on Hospital Social Work

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates patient perceptions of factors influencing the efficiency of hospital social work services. Specifically, it explores the perceived role of social workers in addressing patients' psychosocial needs and identifies potential strategies for enhancing service efficiency. By understanding the patient perspective, this research aims to illuminate the impact of various factors on social work effectiveness and ultimately contribute to improved patient care delivery. Methods: A convenience sampling technique was employed to recruit 130 patients from Trung Vuong Hospital who participated in a self-administered survey assessing their perspectives on hospital social work services. The survey comprised two scales: one evaluating factors affecting social work efficiency and another proposing measures for improvement. Descriptive statistics were utilized for data analysis. Results: Patient perceptions identified "patient needs" and "knowledge and skills of medical staff, doctors, and social workers" as the most critical factors impacting hospital social work efficiency. This underscores the importance of ongoing professional development for social workers and ensuring adequate staffing levels. Proposed strategies for improvement included: enhanced professional training for social workers, fostering effective communication regarding social work services available to patients, and the expansion of external resource networks to provide comprehensive support for patients facing complex challenges. Conclusion: This study sheds light on critical areas for optimizing hospital social work efficiency, highlighting the importance of strategic staffing decisions, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and prioritizing continuous professional development for social workers. By integrating patient feedback into service delivery models, social work departments can enhance patient support and contribute to improved healthcare outcomes. Future research efforts should strive for broader generalizability by incorporating diverse healthcare settings and soliciting the perspectives of a wider range of stakeholders. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of social work effectiveness in the evolving landscape of healthcare delivery.

Keywords: Hospital, Social Work, Patient Perceptions, Efficiency

INTRODUCTION

Hospital social workers are indispensable members of the healthcare team, significantly impacting patient well-being and discharge processes (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019). Their roles extend far beyond traditional views, encompassing a wide range of services from addressing psychosocial needs to coordinating crucial community resources (Abramson, 1990; de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019). In integrated healthcare models, social workers play a vital role, tackling behavioral health, psychosocial, and physical healthcare concerns, ultimately improving patient and community outcomes (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019). They further empower patients by developing interventions that enhance control over post-hospital care decisions, emphasizing the importance of patient-centered care planning (Abramson, 1990). Emergency departments are another key area where social workers provide essential services like counseling and discharge planning, particularly crucial for vulnerable patients with unmet medical, psychological, and social needs (Moore et al., 2012). This highlights the emergency department as a vital intervention point. Despite existing challenges, effective collaboration between social workers and other healthcare professionals, such as physicians, is paramount for optimal patient care (Mizrahi & Abramson, 2000). The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the resilience and adaptability of social workers, especially in pediatrics, as they rose to the challenge of meeting complex patient needs during a crisis (Ross et al., 2021). This is evidence that underscores the multifaceted and critical role of social workers in healthcare. Their impact on patient well-being, discharge processes, and overall healthcare outcomes necessitates ongoing research and policy support to maximize their potential in improving patient care.

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The issue of ineffective social work services and its impact on patient experiences and outcomes is multifaceted and complex, relating to various aspects of healthcare delivery. A thorough review has highlighted the positive effects of social work services on health outcomes and costs, emphasizing the profession's broad health perspective in addressing patient, personal, and environmental needs. However, the review also noted the importance of more controlled trials to explore the specific value-added of social work in interprofessional team-based care (Steketee et al., 2017). The fragmentation of care is another significant concern that negatively affects patient outcomes, particularly for those with chronic illnesses. This underscores the need for healthcare leaders to implement strategies that reduce care fragmentation (Joo, 2023). Burnout among health care professionals is intricately connected to substandard service provision and exerts a substantial influence on the welfare of nurses, patient safety, care quality, satisfaction, and organizational results (Nguyen et al., 2024). The relationship between nurse burnout and patient outcomes highlights the importance of viewing burnout as an organizational issue rather than an individual problem (Jun et al., 2021). Patient experiences are influenced by various factors such as clinically competent nurses, collaborative working relationships, autonomous nursing practice, and adequate staffing. Nurses have reported a high administrative workload and pressure to increase productivity, which they believe detracts from the quality of patient care (Kieft et al., 2014). These findings emphasize the critical need for healthcare systems to focus on improving interprofessional collaboration, reducing burnout, and ensuring adequate staffing and support for nurses.

Patient perspectives are a cornerstone of effective and efficient hospital social work. By incorporating their feedback, social workers gain invaluable insights into the effectiveness of interventions, uncover hidden needs, and tailor social work practices to address the specific challenges faced by patients (Khalife et al., 2023; McDonald et al., 2019). This not only empowers social workers to develop targeted discharge plans and enhance patient satisfaction, but ultimately leads to improved health outcomes (Khalife et al., 2023; McDonald et al., 2019). Integrating patient perspectives fosters a patient-centered care environment, ensuring social work services align with patient expectations and healthcare goals. This research explored patient perceptions of: (a) factors impacting hospital social work efficiency and (b) potential strategies to improve social work service efficiency.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

A convenience sampling method was employed for participant recruitment. This involved inviting 130 patients from Trung Vuong Hospital to participate in the study. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The sample consisted of 130 patients participating in the survey. In terms of gender distribution, there were 76 male patients (58.5%) and 54 female patients (41.5%). Regarding age distribution, the majority of participants fell within the elderly category (60 years old and above), accounting for 43.1% of the sample. This was followed by the middle-aged group (36-60 years old) at 40.8%, and the young age group (23-35 years old) at 11.5%. The youngest age group (15-23 years old) had the lowest representation, at 4.6%. **Table 1** presents the detailed socio-demographic of participants.

Table 1 Demographic of patients.

		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	76	58.5
	Female	54	41.5
Age	15-23 years old	6	4.6
	23-35 years old	15	11.5
	36-60 years old	53	40.8
	Above 60 years old	56	43.1

Notes: N = 130; n. number of participants; %. percentage.

Measurement

To gather patient perspectives on factors affecting hospital social work efficiency and potential measures for improvement, a self-administered questionnaire was specifically developed for this study. The questionnaire consisted of two distinct scales. The first scale comprised five items designed to assess factors perceived by patients to influence hospital social work efficiency. Responses to this scale utilized a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not at all affect") to 5 ("Extremely affect"). The second scale included six items focused on proposed measures for enhancing social work efficiency, as suggested by patients. Responses on this scale also employed a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("Not at all necessary") to 5 ("Extremely necessary").

Data Analysis

Following the approach outlined by Malhotra et al. (2017), which emphasizes that a scale's origin and unit are arbitrary and that positive linear transformations do not alter its core properties, the original rating scale (from 1 to 5) was transformed to facilitate analysis. This transformation involved calculating the difference between the highest and lowest values in the original scale (4). The unit length ('b') was then determined by dividing this difference by the number of scale points (4 / 5 = 0.80), representing the increment between transformed values. To establish upper limits for the transformed categories, the formula "y = a + bx" was employed, where 'a' represents the lowest original value (1) and 'b' is the unit length (0.80). This resulted in the following categories:

- Not at all affect/necessary (1.00 – 1.80)
- Slightly affect/necessary (1.81 – 2.60)
- Moderately affect/necessary (2.61 – 3.40)
- Very affect/necessary (3.41 – 4.20)
- Extremely affect/necessary (4.21 – 5.00)

Following data collection, the dataset was meticulously coded and cleaned in Microsoft Excel to eliminate any errors. Subsequently, the data was imported into SPSS version 20 for comprehensive analysis. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the data.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics revealed that patients identified "Patient needs" (M = 4.58, R = 1) and "Knowledge and skills of medical staff, doctors, and social workers" (M = 4.32, R = 2) as the factors most significantly affecting hospital social work efficiency. These factors were rated as having an "extremely affect" impact. "The staff to perform social work services is not guaranteed" (M = 4.08, R = 3), "Patients do not know about social work services in the hospital" (M = 3.85, R = 4), and "Hospital facilities" (M = 3.36, R = 5) were perceived as having a "very affect" impact. **Table 2** shows factors perceived by patients to influence hospital social work efficiency.

Table 2 Patient opinions on key factors affecting hospital social work efficiency.

Factors	Not at all affect		Slightly affect		Moderately affect		Very affect		Extremely affect		Mean	Ranking
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Patients do not know about social work services in the hospital	0	0	3	2.3	23	17.7	95	73.1	9	6.9	3.85	4
Patient needs	0	0	5	3.8	10	7.7	20	15.4	95	73.1	4.58	1
Hospital facilities	0	0	21	16.2	18	13.8	79	60.8	12	60.8	3.63	5
Knowledge and skills of medical staff, doctors, and social workers	0	0	0	0	19	14.6	51	39.2	60	46.2	4.32	2
The staff to perform social work services is not guaranteed	0	0	0	0	8	6.2	104	80.0	18	13.8	4.08	3
Total (n = 130)											4.10	

Descriptive statistics analyses indicated that patients considered several measures to be "extremely necessary" for enhancing hospital social work efficiency. These included "Training social workers in hospitals to be more professional" (M = 4.42, R = 1), " Ensuring staff to perform social work services" (M = 4.37, R = 2), " Communication and information about social work services for patients" (M = 4.30, R = 3), and " Expand the network to connect external resources to support patients in difficult circumstances" (M = 4.22, R = 4). Additionally, "Expand social work service activities" (M = 3.98, R = 5) and "Improve the quality of hospital facilities" (M = 3.85, R = 6) were rated as "very necessary" for improving efficiency. **Table 3** shows proposed measures by patients for enhancing social work efficiency.

Table 3 Patient opinions on proposed measures to increase social work efficiency.

Factors	Not at all necessary		Slightly necessary		Moderately necessary		Very necessary		Extremely necessary		Mean	Ranking
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Communication and information about social work services for patients	0	0	0	0	9	14.6	53	40.8	58	44.6	4.30	3
Expand the network to connect external resources to support patients in difficult circumstances	0	0	0	0	11	8.5	79	60.8	40	30.8	4.22	4
Improve the quality of hospital facilities	0	0	0	0	7	8.5	75	57.7	18	13.8	3.85	6
Training social workers in hospitals to be more professional	0	0	0	0	3	2.3	69	53.1	58	44.6	4.42	1
Expand social work service activities	0	0	2	1.5	25	19.2	76	58.5	27	20.8	3.98	5
Ensuring staff to perform social work services	0	0	0	0	12	9.2	58	44.6	60	46.2	4.37	2
<i>Total (n = 130)</i>											<i>4.19</i>	

DISCUSSION

This study investigated patient perceptions of factors influencing hospital social work efficiency and potential measures to enhance it. Descriptive statistics revealed that a significant portion of patients concurred that both the identified factors and proposed measures had a substantial impact on efficiency.

Hospital social workers act as vital linchpins within the healthcare system, ensuring a seamless transition between medical intervention and a patient's successful reintegration into daily life. Their multifaceted role encompasses providing psychosocial support, meticulously planning discharge procedures, and fostering connections with pertinent community resources. Consequently, the efficacy of hospital social work services proves instrumental not only in optimizing patient care but also in bolstering the healthcare system as a whole (Petruzzi et al., 2023). Hospitalized patients frequently present with a multitude of complex social, emotional, and financial needs that extend beyond the realm of medical intervention (Trochez et al., 2023). These may encompass securing stable housing, maintaining employment, navigating insurance intricacies, and accessing appropriate community resources. The sheer complexity and heterogeneity of these needs can pose a significant challenge for hospital social workers, potentially hindering their ability to comprehensively address each case (Petruzzi et al., 2023). A prevalent concern within many healthcare environments is the high patient-to-social worker ratio, which translates to limited time dedicated to individual patient cases (Krell & Rosenberg, 1984; Tadic et al., 2020). This becomes particularly problematic when patients present with intricate and time-consuming needs. Such scenarios can trigger delays in service provision, potentially compromise the quality of care delivered, and ultimately lead to a decline in the overall efficiency of the social work department (McHugh et al., 2021; Petruzzi et al., 2023).

The proficiency of hospital social work is demonstrably contingent upon the combined knowledge and expertise of medical staff, doctors, and social workers themselves (McLaney et al., 2022; Schot et al., 2020).

Each professional group within the hospital ecosystem plays a distinct and vital role in patient care. Furthermore, their ability to foster effective collaboration becomes paramount in successfully navigating the intricate needs of patients with complex challenges. The contemporary healthcare landscape emphasizes the pivotal role of interdisciplinary teams in delivering comprehensive patient care (Bendowska & Baum, 2023; McLaney et al., 2022; Tadic et al., 2020). Each member of this team, encompassing medical staff, doctors, and social workers, contributes a unique and valuable perspective informed by their specialized knowledge and skillsets. This synergy fosters a holistic approach to patient care, ensuring that medical, psychosocial, and practical needs are addressed comprehensively (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; McLaney et al., 2022; Moncatar et al., 2021). Furthermore, efficient hospital social work hinges on seamless collaboration among these professionals. When each member possesses a clear understanding of the scope and limitations inherent in the others' roles, the team is empowered to function cohesively and deliver optimal patient outcomes (McLaney et al., 2022). While adept at navigating the healthcare system and advocating for patient needs, the effectiveness of social workers is demonstrably amplified when supported by knowledgeable medical staff (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; Tadic et al., 2020). Medical professionals who possess an awareness of the broader social and economic determinants of health can work synergistically with social workers to advocate for essential resources, both within the healthcare system and through external community organizations (American Psychological Association, 2013; Girgis et al., 2018; Kreuter et al., 2021). This collaborative approach fosters the provision of comprehensive patient support, encompassing not only medical treatment but also vital social services. Ultimately, such collaboration enhances the overall efficiency of care delivery (American Psychological Association, 2013). Effective hospital social work hinges on a comprehensive understanding and targeted interventions aimed at addressing the social determinants of health (Chelak & Chakole, 2023; Flaks-Manov et al., 2019). Medical staff and doctors equipped with the knowledge to recognize these factors can proactively identify at-risk patients. This facilitates close collaboration with social workers, enabling the development of a holistic intervention plan that encompasses not only medically appropriate treatment but also vital social support (McLaney et al., 2022). Such an interdisciplinary approach demonstrably improves patient outcomes. Reduced readmission rates, facilitated by successful discharges, translate to enhanced hospital efficiency (Hesslink et al., 2014; Kripalani et al., 2014; Rammohan et al., 2023).

A critical challenge plaguing hospital social work services is the staff to perform social work services is not guaranteed. This inconsistency in workforce allocation significantly hinders the efficiency of social work departments within healthcare institutions. Insufficient staffing levels translate into an increased workload for existing social workers (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019). This translates to a cascade of negative consequences, including extended wait times for patients seeking social work services, delays in discharge planning, and ultimately, a decline in the quality of care provided (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Maghsoud et al., 2022). Overburdened social workers may be forced to allocate less time to each patient case, potentially compromising their ability to comprehensively address all critical aspects of care planning and support. The confluence of high caseloads and the emotionally demanding nature of hospital social work can culminate in staff burnout (Ratzon et al., 2022; Stanley & Sebastine, 2023). This burnout not only compromises the quality of care delivered to patients but also precipitates an increase in staff turnover rates (Stanley & Sebastine, 2023). Effective hospital social work extends beyond addressing immediate patient needs. It encompasses meticulous discharge planning and the creation of long-term care plans, often involving the coordination of home health services, outpatient follow-up appointments, and connection to pertinent community resources (Friedman et al., 2016; Gledhill et al., 2023; Reckrey et al., 2014). However, inadequate staffing levels can create gaps in the provision of these crucial services. Such gaps have been linked to a concerning rise in readmission rates and a decline in overall patient outcomes (Bradley et al., 2015).

When patients are not informed about the availability of social work services in the hospital, it can significantly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of these services. A critical barrier to effective social work service utilization is the lack of patient awareness regarding the available support. Patients who remain uninformed about these services are less likely to proactively seek them out, resulting in underutilization. This knowledge gap can lead to many patients failing to receive crucial support for social determinants of health, encompassing financial assistance, mental health services, and navigation of the healthcare system itself. Furthermore, when patients lack awareness of social work services, the burden of addressing these non-medical yet health-

impacting issues may fall on healthcare staff, such as nurses and doctors (Tael et al., 2021). This not only compromises the efficiency of overall care delivery but also diverts medical professionals from their core clinical responsibilities.

Hospital facilities significantly impact hospital social work efficiency for several reasons. The efficiency of hospital social work services demonstrably improves within environments that foster seamless collaboration among healthcare professionals (Kwame & Petručka, 2021; Rosen et al., 2018). Hospital facilities that prioritize integrated workspaces serve as catalysts for more effective communication and teamwork, ultimately leading to a more coordinated approach to patient care. Modern hospital social work practices are heavily reliant on technology to access patient information, communicate effectively with colleagues, and facilitate care coordination. Consequently, access to cutting-edge technological resources, such as electronic health records (EHRs) and secure messaging platforms, can significantly enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of social worker interventions.

It is crucial to provide professional training to social workers in hospitals to enhance the efficiency of social work services. Continuous professional training equips hospital social workers with the latest methodologies, ethical standards, and evidence-based practices, ensuring that patient care remains both efficacious and compassionate (Castillo et al., 2019; Ghelani, 2022). Training encompasses specialized areas such as crisis intervention, mental health support, and healthcare system navigation, empowering social workers to deliver comprehensive support to patients and their families. The healthcare environment necessitates collaboration with a diverse range of professionals, including doctors, nurses, and therapists (Tadic et al., 2020). To foster this collaboration effectively, social work training often integrates elements of teamwork and communication, preparing them to function seamlessly within interdisciplinary teams (McLaney et al., 2022; Rape Žiberna, 2022). This collaborative approach is instrumental in achieving coordinated care planning and ultimately, improved patient outcomes.

It is imperative to ensure adequate staffing for social work services in hospitals in order to enhance the efficiency of these services. Sufficient staffing levels are paramount in ensuring timely social work support for patients and their families (Dimla et al., 2023; Petrucci et al., 2023). This prompt intervention is demonstrably crucial for addressing immediate needs, facilitating effective discharge planning, and connecting patients with essential community resources. Timely support serves a preventative function, mitigating delays in patient care and demonstrably improving overall patient outcomes (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; Petrucci et al., 2023). Furthermore, appropriate staffing levels promote manageable workloads for individual social workers, thereby mitigating the risk of burnout (Stevens, 2008). Burnout not only negatively impacts social workers' well-being but also compromises the quality of care delivered to patients. By ensuring adequate staffing, hospitals can uphold a high standard of social work services while fostering job satisfaction among social workers. With a robust social work team, hospitals are empowered to deliver comprehensive care that encompasses the full spectrum of patient needs, extending beyond the purely medical to encompass psychosocial well-being (Tadic et al., 2020). Social workers play a vital role in conducting patient needs assessments, facilitating referrals, and providing support for issues that extend beyond the scope of medical treatment, such as financial concerns, housing, and mental health services. Adequate staffing levels are instrumental in facilitating this holistic approach to patient care.

Clear and comprehensive communication regarding social services is crucial for efficient delivery in hospitals. Patient and family awareness of available social work services is a critical factor influencing service utilization (Kreuter et al., 2021). Increased utilization translates to earlier interventions, enabling social workers to address patient needs more efficiently and potentially prevent issues from escalating (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; Kreuter et al., 2021; Vseteckova et al., 2021). Social workers play a pivotal role in discharge planning and post-discharge support by proactively informing patients about these services (Dimla et al., 2023). This comprehensive approach demonstrably reduces hospital readmission rates, a key metric of social work effectiveness and overall hospital efficiency, by ensuring patients have the necessary support systems in place upon returning home (de Saxe Zerden et al., 2019; Petrucci et al., 2023).

It is vital to expand hospital networks to connect external resources and provide better support for patients in difficult circumstances, thereby increasing the efficiency of social work. A patient's healthcare needs often extend beyond the confines of the hospital setting, encompassing social determinants of health such as housing instability, food insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to ongoing care (Kreuter et al., 2021). Social workers play a vital role in addressing these broader determinants by connecting patients with external resources, ultimately promoting patient well-being (Lian et al., 2021). Access to a comprehensive network of support services demonstrably impacts health outcomes. For instance, securing stable housing and ensuring access to nutritious food can prevent complications or readmissions directly related to the patient's medical condition (Aremu et al., 2022; Kini & Ho, 2018). Furthermore, social work interventions such as assisting with medication costs or facilitating transportation to follow-up appointments can enhance patient adherence to prescribed treatment plans.

Hospital social workers play a pivotal role in demonstrably improving patient outcomes through a comprehensive range of interventions, including transitional care, care coordination, behavioral health support, and case management (Petruzzi et al., 2023). Studies have shown that these interventions significantly improve readmission, mortality, and healthcare utilization rates in over 80% of cases, highlighting the social work profession's critical contribution to optimizing healthcare delivery (Petruzzi et al., 2023). The evolving healthcare landscape necessitates a corresponding evolution in the roles and activities of social workers. This necessitates ongoing evaluation and research to substantiate the value and efficacy of social work services within hospitals. Such efforts will inform quality improvement initiatives and pave the way for the expansion of service activities to further enhance patient care outcomes (Judd & Sheffield, 2010). Interestingly, research suggests a positive association between workplace social capital, defined as the supportive relationships and networks within a healthcare setting, and the quality of care delivered (Maassen et al., 2021; Pedersen et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of fostering a positive work environment for social workers and other healthcare professionals. By investing in improved hospital facilities and fostering collaboration, hospitals can create a social infrastructure that supports the delivery of high-quality patient care.

IMPLICATIONS

To optimize hospital social work efficiency, healthcare administrators must prioritize strategic staffing with a focus on aligning social worker numbers with patient loads. This mitigates burnout and staff turnover, ultimately preserving the quality of patient care. Furthermore, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration through targeted training programs, the use of collaborative tools, and the creation of dedicated communication spaces is crucial. Finally, investing in technological infrastructure, such as electronic health records and secure messaging platforms, streamlines workflows, improves communication, and enhances patient care coordination across all healthcare professionals.

Optimizing hospital social work necessitates a multifaceted approach. Firstly, continuous professional development through lifelong learning ensures social workers possess the latest methodologies, ethical standards, and evidence-based practices. Secondly, effective patient engagement strategies are crucial, requiring clear communication of available services and proactive measures to inform patients and families of available support. Finally, social workers must take a more expansive approach to external networks. This entails building and maintaining comprehensive support systems by identifying and collaborating with community resources, while also advocating for patient access to these crucial services.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The generalizability of these findings is limited by the inherent diversity of healthcare settings. Variations in organizational structures, patient demographics, and available resources across different hospitals and systems necessitate further investigation into how social work efficiency translates within these unique contexts. Additionally, the study's focus on patient perceptions omits the valuable perspectives of social workers, healthcare professionals, and administrators. A more holistic understanding requires incorporating their insights regarding the impact of cultural and socioeconomic factors on patient needs, resource access, and the applicability of proposed improvements. Future research should explore the effectiveness of social work services across varied settings, consider diverse stakeholder perspectives, and address the practical challenges

of implementing these enhancements. Long-term studies examining the impact of improved social work services on patient care and healthcare system performance would further strengthen the understanding of this area.

CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study, drawing on patient perceptions and descriptive statistics, explores factors influencing hospital social work efficiency and proposes measures for improvement. Hospital social workers are revealed as linchpins of the healthcare system, guiding patients through intricate social, emotional, and financial challenges. Their multifaceted role encompasses providing psychosocial support, meticulously planning discharges, and connecting patients with community resources, thereby optimizing both individual patient care and the healthcare system as a whole. However, the analysis identifies high patient-to-worker ratios, complex patient needs, and understaffing as significant impediments to social work efficacy. These challenges necessitate strategic staffing decisions, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and ensuring continuous professional development for social workers. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of patient awareness about social work services, the impact of hospital facilities on workflow, and the need for expanded hospital networks to connect patients with crucial external resources. Actionable strategies for healthcare administrators include prioritizing staffing, enhancing collaboration among healthcare professionals, and investing in technological infrastructure. Social workers, meanwhile, can optimize their services by engaging in continuous learning, developing effective patient engagement strategies, and adopting an expansive approach to building external support networks. While acknowledging limitations in generalizability due to the diversity of healthcare settings and the evolving nature of healthcare delivery, the study underscores the need for future research incorporating broader stakeholder perspectives and exploring the effectiveness of social work services across various contexts. Ultimately, by addressing identified challenges and implementing proposed enhancements, hospitals can significantly improve their social work services, leading not only to better patient outcomes but also to a more robust healthcare system, solidifying the vital role of hospital social workers in navigating the complexities of patient care.

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