

Palliative Social Work as a Bridge: From Invisible Vulnerability to Equitable and Integrated Care

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Abstract

Introduction

Social work in palliative care is a field where specialists can use social screening to identify the types of vulnerabilities present in oncology patients requiring palliative care, communicate with other members of the interdisciplinary team, and develop a personalized service plan to provide holistic care and ensure quality of life.

Research Method

Semi-structured interviews conducted in 2026 with specialists working at the Saint Nectarios Palliative Care Center in Bucharest and with chaplains serving as volunteers.

A total of 20 specialists participated in the study, comprising 4 women and 16 men.

Results

Palliative care patients face multiple, concurrent vulnerabilities; consequently, they require social support and social screening, as well as the identification of the determinants affecting their health, the barriers they encounter, and the factors that help maintain their health and quality of life.

Although the care team comprises various specialists, the social worker can make a significant contribution to integrated care by communicating the patient's identified needs and vulnerabilities, thereby enabling timely intervention to prevent health deterioration.

Conclusions

Thanks to their professional training, skills, and acquired competencies, palliative care social workers make a significant contribution to the holistic care of patients, acting as a bridge between other specialists, family members, and the community.

In Romania, there is a need to introduce palliative care education at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels across all social work faculties, as well as to implement standardized tools for social workers practicing in palliative care.

Keywords: integrated care, palliative care, social work, vulnerability