



Introduction to the Special Issue: Social Workers at Work

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This special issue of *Clinical Social Work Journal* focuses on clinical social workers at work. It explores actual contemporary practice in varied contexts, including services for racially and gender diverse populations. The idea for this issue came from the realization that there are very few outlets for practicing social workers to share what they are doing in the field. Unless practice research is presented in a traditional academic way, academic journals will often choose not to publish such work. As a result, our field is uninformed about the innovative programs and practices that are happening in communities. The goal of this issue was to provide examples of the incredible work that social work practitioners are doing in the field and present their work in informative and instructional format. As such, we asked authors to outline what they were doing, as well as discuss some of the challenges and lessons learned that may help other practitioners working in similar settings or with similar populations. We wanted this issue to be of maximal benefit to clinical practitioners and not only to academics. There are many new ideas and approaches to practice presented and we hope that our readers will find these articles to be helpful in their own practice settings. Moving forward the Journal would like to encourage other practitioners to share their work and we will be dedicating a separate section within our issues for such reports. Hopefully in this way, we will contribute to the sharing of knowledge through this dissemination format.

NASW (n.d.) points out that there are more clinically trained social workers—over 200,000—than psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric nurses combined. As stated

above, our goal was to provide a way for these real-world practitioners to display their work and to inform others. This special issue includes variety of methods and techniques, for both individual and team practice and we encouraged the authors to focus on *doing* clinical practice. We believe these articles do provide insight into contemporary clinical social work practices.

This issue includes eight articles. Mirrick, Bridger and McCauley offer “Trauma-Informed School-Based Postvention Services: Supports to Students Following a Suicide Death” examining services for middle and high school students following a death by suicide. Sadly, this topic has become more a common feature of school linked practice. Given the trauma involved, SAMHSA’s six principles of trauma-informed care: safety; trust and transparency; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; peer support; and attention to cultural, historical, and gender issues are each addressed and illustrated. The article details the authors’ practice experiences supporting schools following a death by suicide, postvention guidelines, and trauma-informed principles applied to support students, staff, and the community following a death. A case study illustrates the service model as delivered.

Santiago-Warner’s “The Integration of the Resolved Through Sharing Perinatal Bereavement Follow-up Model with Latinx Cultural Values: A Case Illustration” describes the Resolved Through Sharing perinatal bereavement model as employed in practice with birthing people and their families who have experienced a perinatal loss. Such ambiguous losses are hard for both families suffering a loss and those supporting them. The RTS model is designed to help families cope with their grief and integrate the loss in their lives during the initial crisis and to offer comprehensive care to each member of the family affected by the loss. This paper uses a composite case study illustration to describe a year-long bereavement follow-up with an undocumented underinsured Latina woman who suffered a stillbirth during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ho and colleagues’ article, “The Family as Faculty Training Program: Preparing Families to be Faculty Partners in

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Healthcare Education” details an innovative training program for family members that embodies the core principles of family centered care (FCC). FCC is a model that promotes self-determination and family empowerment by positioning family members as partners in healthcare treatment, delivery, and decision-making. FCC helps ensure program designs and educational services fully reflect users’ perspectives and experiences. Their Teaching and Facilitation Course for Family as Faculty is the first program of its kind in Canada and was recently recognized by the Health Standards Organization of Canada as a leading practice in healthcare.

Corrado offers a model linking storytelling and practice in “Trauma Storiez with Urban Youth of Color.” ‘Storiez’ is a nine-step model that starts where clients are, and supports youth in reflecting on their experiences, creatively processing their narratives, integrating memories, and developing a future vision. Since urban youth are often victims of complex trauma, the model supports cultural competence and client strengths while engaging youths fully. The model both looks at the impact of trauma and points toward visions of the future. It draws effectively on contemporary arts to help youth find purpose.

Maddock and colleagues examined a program to support practicing social workers in their article entitled “The Mindfulness-based Social Work and Self-care Programme: A Focus Group Study.” Given the stresses of social work practice, their goal is to support and enhance practice while reducing levels of work stress, burnout, and attrition. Brief mindfulness programs are discussed in depth. Focus group participants found this program increased professional motivation and self-awareness, as well as encouraging the use of mindfulness techniques in practice. Participants particularly liked having a program tailored specifically to social workers.

McCrossin explores how not only the individual patient, but an entire family, is affected by acquired brain injury. Impairment sustained from such injuries can last anywhere from a few days to an entire lifetime, depending on the injury severity. There are more than 2.8 million people with such injuries. In “Clinical Social Work with Families Affected by Brain Injuries: A Case Example” he shows how existing family-based knowledge and skills can be applied to serving this common, but understudied, form of injury. The case study grounds the piece, which also provides references and information on comprehensive brain injury family interventions.

Bryne and colleagues address “Rush@Home: Serving the Community Where they are Most Comfortable.” Based in the Rush University Medical Center, this team provides home-based primary care, bringing care to individuals with complex healthcare needs where they are most comfortable. The authors note how the impact of social determinants of health and socially structured oppressions make access to health and mental health care challenging for many diverse clients, undermining service access and effectiveness. Of course, home based care (home visits) has a long history in social work practice. Their program details their model and points to the many merits of home-based care. The benefits of a racially and language diverse practice team are also emphasized.

Fox’s “The Integration of Somatic-based Strategies into Couples Therapy” integrates attention to somatically-based emotional experience in addition to verbal interaction. Noting that somatic theories are generally focused on individuals, this piece connects somatic techniques to couples’ treatment and communication. Interventive strategies such as creating and maintaining structure within sessions, tracking bodily signs of nervous system activation, using strategies for nervous system regulation and implementing directed interventions are addressed in detail. Many case illustrations are provided.

While the authors in this special issue are a mix of practitioners and practitioners with academic connections, we believe this special issue shows innovations in what social workers do in clinical practice. These articles will help others social workers incorporate new methods and perspectives in their own work. These articles also show the many efforts of clinical social workers to best serve their clients and communities.

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