

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK
IN PRIMARY CARE
IN IRELAND

Social Workers in Primary Care
Special Interest Group of the IASW

Ed.

Torin Fleming, Sharon Flood, Sylwia Gumulka,
Deirdre Jacob, Ray Parkinson &
Patrice Reilly

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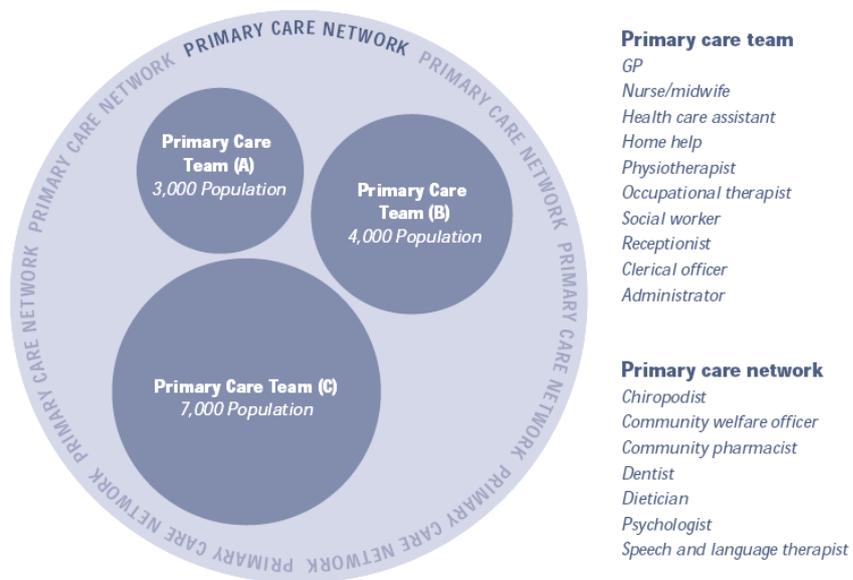
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Introduction:

Generic social workers are core members of the Primary Care Teams in the Irish Primary Care Strategy (Department of Health and Children, 2001). The Department of Health and Children continue by stating in a later primary care development guidance document that all members of Primary Care Teams “... require new roles and responsibilities to be defined which reflect the generalist nature and content of work within the primary care team and which place a significant emphasis on interdisciplinary working” (DoHC, 2004: 51). This document aims to address this.

Figure 1: Primary Care Team and Primary Care Network



From: Department of Health and Children (2001: 22) Primary Care: A New Direction *Quality and Fairness - A Health System for You* Health Strategy

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK?

“The social work profession promotes change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work” (International Federation of Social Work, 2001).

The purpose of Social Work is problem-solving, empowerment and social change where people interact with their environments (Payne 2006, IFSW 2001).

WHAT IS PRIMARY HEALTH CARE?

The World Health Organisation Declaration on Primary Health Care (also known as “Health for All 2000”) developed the following social model definition of Primary Health Care:

“Primary Health Care is essential health care based on practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable methods and technology made universally accessible to individuals and families in the community through their full participation and at a cost that the community and country can afford to maintain at every stage of their development in the spirit of self-reliance and self-determination. It forms an integral part both of the country’s health system, of which it is the central function and main focus, and of the overall social and economic development of the community.”
(WHO Alma Ata 1978)

Primary Health Care seeks “health for all” through full participation of communities in pursuit of social justice and equality (WHO 1978, CSDH, 2008). The IFSW , in its own policy statement on health, very much favours these WHO principles, as they proposed Primary Health Care as the key tool to promote what we now call ‘Population Health’ by tackling what is now called the ‘social determinants of health’.(IFSW 2008).

The Primary Care Model is an interdisciplinary team based approach to service delivery which aims to “move care, where appropriate, from secondary to primary level, from primary level to self care (by empowering people), and from self care to no care requirement (through illness prevention and health promotion)” (DoHC, 2001: 21).

“Primary care is an approach to care that includes a range of services to keep people well..... The services provide first-level contact that is fully accessible by self-referral and have a strong emphasis on working with communities and individuals to improve their health and social well-being.” (Murphy, 2009).

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE IN IRELAND:

The mission of the Health Service Executive (HSE) is ‘to enable people live healthier and more fulfilled lives’ according to the Corporate Plan, 2008 (HSE, 2008)

The HSE’s Health Inequalities Framework 2010-2012 recognises that ‘the health of individuals, groups and communities is affected not only by the level of health and social-care services provision, but equally by the degree of access to them’ (HSE, 2008: 4).

To this end, the Health Service Executive (HSE) has adopted a Population Health vision and approach (HSE, 2007 and HSE, 2008)

“A Population Health approach is one which promotes and protects the health of the whole population or sub-groups, with particular emphasis on reducing health inequalities.” (HSE, 2008).

Population Health will be achieved by increasing the “emphasis on primary care and health promotion” and “improving user participation and empowerment.” (HSE, 2009). The Irish Health Service Executive’s recognition of Primary Care Teams as having a key role in promoting health and addressing health inequalities is highlighted in the HSE Health Inequalities Framework 2010 – 2012. The document further emphasises capacity building for health and to address health inequalities as key to reducing the gap in health outcomes between subgroups of any population.

“Social Work promotes and advocates the rights-based social model of health and Population Health, and the right to ‘Health for All’, is a requirement of social justice.” (IFSW, 2008).

**THE SOCIAL WORK GENERALIST ROLE ON THE
PRIMARY CARE TEAM:**

“The focus of primary care social work is to support the delivery of health and personal social services at the local level. Social work’s particular area of expertise relates to personal social services. Delivering such services involves supporting the service user to improve their own circumstances and health status. In this work, the values and related approaches that a primary care social worker would use include advocacy, promotion of independence, an individualised care plan and the promotion of dignity, respect, client choice and self esteem” (IASW, 2008: 4/5).

All disciplines on Primary Care Teams work with the whole person, from cradle to grave in the community context, in a way that is generic needs focussed, tackling all the determinants of health, including the social determinants, in equal participative partnership (World Health Organization: World Health Report 2008: *Primary Health Care Now More Than Ever* p.43). Social Workers in Primary Care are agents of social change, offering a service to individuals, families, groups and communities that is:

1. Voluntary
2. Cradle to grave
3. Generic
4. Open access (anyone, including a service user, can refer to the Social Worker on the Primary Care Team):

Some of the functions of the Primary Care Social Worker include:

- Holistic Needs Assessment
- Consultation with other health and social care providers
- Education and training in Health and Social Care
- Community development and capacity building
- Concrete service provision
- Support Counselling and therapeutic services

(Adapted from: Fildes and Cooper, 2003).

“Social work is a diverse profession working in many of the health and social sectors included in a primary health care approach. Across all of these sectors, social work has always maintained a strong “person in environment” approach to working with individuals, families, groups and communities. By working within the framework of the determinants of health, social workers make the necessary links between the physical, social, emotional and economic impacts of health” (CASW 2007).

Social Workers on Primary Care Teams aim to tackle health inequalities, promote self determination, build capacity and work with people to deal with issues that may be causing them distress and/or limiting their well being. Our social focus is our added value and added difference.

The Social Worker works with any person, family or group to make changes they want by finding solutions to any difficulties or needs that they identify: An individual may wish to discuss anything that concerns her/him, or their relationships, or people may be seeking social supports from community self-help groups or from agencies.

The Social Worker also works in partnership with community groups to develop cooperative action for their greater control of any service that affects the community's health and well-being. This includes advocacy and social action to address health and social inequalities and other barriers to fairness, access and quality of care:

“It can be difficult for a number of client groups to access social work services in their area or in relation to their specific concern” (IASW, 2008: 3). Social Workers on Primary Care Teams will act to empower users to access the services and resources they require and in keeping with the ethos of user participation, self help and motivation, aim to foster the service user's own ability to recover and maintain a good quality of life. The Primary Care Social Worker, working as part of a inter-disciplinary team, aims to promote health and well-being, focuses on fostering advocacy and empowerment and seeks to encourage self-help in the local community (IASW, 2008).

**CURRENT ACTIVITES OF SOCIAL WORKERS ON
PRIMARY CARE TEAMS:**

Social Workers are involved in the process of community needs assessments and promoting community participation: The role of the primary care social worker is influenced by the needs of each primary care area to which the social worker is attached. A key element of social work in primary care is that of community development and the promotion of community participation, especially where there is social exclusion. “Community participation in primary care will be strengthened by encouraging and facilitating the involvement of local community and voluntary groups in the planning and delivery of primary care services.” (DoHC 2001:

39).Communities now have the opportunity to discuss their own health and social care needs and become an intrinsic part in the delivery of services to meet these needs.

Social Workers are involved in launching /facilitating health promotion group-work initiatives e.g. anxiety management, self-esteem/self-confidence support groups, healthy eating groups etc. PCSW's have been identified as an intrinsic aspect of the community participation process and as such some PCSW's are actively involved in setting up participative community health forums in their local PCT areas (Pillinger, 2010). Social Workers have also been promoting and facilitating local health fairs, public library based healthy reading resources, new rural meals-on-wheels services, as well as creating network links between PCT's and local area partnerships, local authorities etc..

Social Workers in Primary Care offer ease of access to generalist social work services as a preventative measure, aiming to avoid deterioration of people's life circumstances and facilitating early interventions by required services and agencies. The social worker acts as a resource to other members of the inter-disciplinary team and to service users through established networks with local services, statutory and voluntary, appropriate to the needs of the service user.

Social Workers on PCT's currently receive and accept referrals concerning people in all age groups and in all Care Groups (and in none) including:

- Individuals/families affected by economic hardship and/or discrimination
- People experiencing challenging / stressful life circumstances
- Persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (if unable to access specialist agency supports)
- People finding it hard to cope with loss
- Persons affected by domestic violence (if there is no local specialist agency)
- Care-givers in need of support or advocacy
- Older persons in difficulty
- Minority ethnic groups
- Persons with disabilities
- Couples and families in conflict
- Vulnerable families and children (for instance due to deprivation)

- Young families and those parenting alone in need of supports
- Parents in stress
- People who abuse substances (including alcohol) who are not linked into existing services
- People with life limiting or long-term illness
- Situations of self neglect
- Advocacy, Information and support regarding entitlements and services

(The above list is not exhaustive. The Social Work Service is open to any person whose health and social well-being is affected by social factors.).

If people have complex needs the Social Workers in Primary Care will facilitate access to the supports needed, (e.g. persons who are suicidal, children at risk, older persons who are abused) and direct referrals will be made to specialist services.

Summary:

Primary care is designed to be the first point of contact for a community's population with the health and personal social services (Murphy, 2009). The range of interdisciplinary services provided at primary care level is fully accessible by self-referral. The World Health Organisation highlighted Primary Health Care as the key tool to promote what we now call 'Population Health' by tackling what is now called the 'social determinants of health'.(IFSW 2008).

The role of the primary care social worker is influenced by the needs of the population in each primary care area to which the social worker is attached. For this reason, the role of the primary care social worker can vary across populations. Social Workers in primary care employ a range of interventions to meet the needs of their population varying from one to one/family casework and group work to community development work, health promotion activities and empowering community participation.

Through working within Dahlgren's (1995) determinants of health framework, social workers in primary care make the necessary links between the physical, emotional,

social and economic impacts on the health of an individual and that of his/her community (CASW 2007).

“One of the most interesting aspects of my work is discovering those amazing individuals in rural parts ...who may have been living with chronic mental illnesses ... for twenty, thirty or forty years; having never assessed by the mental health services. As the PCT SW, I have the privilege of more freedom than my colleagues in accessing and discovering the more vulnerable individuals in society. I am not restricted by the structures, the limitations of or the statutory obligations of other settings”

(Primary Care Social Worker, 2011).

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Appendix 1

Social Work in Primary Care

A Focus on Prevention and Community Development

In many cases the social worker in primary care has an integral role to play in completing a **Community Needs Assessment**. In some instances this has been formally supported by the HSE with structures and funding provided for same. In other cases, this piece of work has been undertaken informally with the social worker in primary care undertaking to gather a range of information, both researched and from local sources through talking to community residents and with colleagues across services, to assess the variety of health needs that the local community may have. This research has then lead to a variety of Community Development, Health Promotion, Group Work & Inter-agency initiatives, a sample of these are listed below. All information has been obtained from members of the IASW Social Workers in Primary Care Special Interest Group during the months of August/September 2013.

Table 2
A Sample of Community Initiatives, Health Promotion & Group Work
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Social Work in Primary Care</i> <i>Promoting Health, Enabling Prevention, & Empowering Community & Group Development</i></p>
<p><u>Group Work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Stress Management Groups:</i><ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>6 week course (OT/PCSW) – Dublin</i>- <i>10 week course (PCSW/PHN) – Kerry. OT workshop on sleep; PT workshop on exercise/movement; Dietician workshop on diet/supplements</i>- <i>Anxiety Management Group, Portarlinton</i>

- *Carer Support Group (PCSW & OT): Setting up and facilitation of 4 week group. Inputs from Physio (Back Care); Primary Care Counsellor (Self Care), OT (Stress Management), Carers Association - Trim*
- *Stroke Support Group: (PCSW & OT), 8 week group - Kerry*
- *Personal Development Group: (PCSW & Psychology) - Birr*
- *Healthy Eating Group: Abbeyleix/Durrow*
- *"Claddagh" Group: Group for people who are socially isolated - Dublin North*
- *Nurturing Families Group: 6 week group to provide information to parents on SLT, Dietician, Parenting, Healthy Eating. This group also included cooking lessons. ???*
- *Time Out for Me: 6 week Parents Group based in primary schools focusing on various workshops covering topics such as healthy eating, addiction, stress management, play and parenting, general health and relaxation techniques - Tallaght*
- *Falls Prevention Group: Physio lead eight week falls prevention group - The key role of the social worker in this group is to facilitate a workshop discussing anxieties and fears associated with falling and other vulnerabilities. The PCT Social Worker also takes the last group of the series as a Focus group to get participant insight into their experiences - Kerry*
- *Stroke Support Group: (Survivors & Carers) – Open Group. SLT & OT lead. PCSW input - Tallaght*
- *Under 65s men with Physical Disabilities Social Group: Pilot - Rialto*

Health Promotion Work

- *Tallaght Annual Community Health Fairs. This event has been hosted annually for the past three years by the two HSE PCSWs, in partnership with members of the local Rapid Health Strategy Group. In 2013, over 75 agencies had a presence providing information and advice on health promotion, illness prevention and illness management. Information from services, both statutory and voluntary (local and national based) was made available to support individuals in maintaining their health and wellbeing. Free health screening opportunities were available at each fair including screening for HIV and other STIs by the GUIDE clinic, blood pressure*

checks by the Irish Heart Foundation and local pharmacies, lung functioning tests by the HSE Smoking Cessation Service, and asthma and sugar level testing by Tallaght Hospital. Healthy food demonstrations and complimentary therapies with stress relieving techniques were amongst other activities running throughout the full day event each year.

- *Local Health and Social Well Being Fairs: Laois/Offaly (Mountrath/Portarlington)*

Community Development Work/ Inter-agency Work

- *Volunteer Befriending Service: Setting up of, recruitment for and supervision of volunteers to befriend and visit local residents in their homes (Kildare).*
- *Get Focal: A community health initiative run collaboratively with the Ballyphehane/Togher CDP, O'Connell Court Supported Housing and the HSE Primary Care Team. An advocacy project with disadvantaged older people. This initiative led to a 2 day conference linking the primary care strategy and a vision for change.*
- *Setting up a Community Creche: North County Dublin*
- *Roma GP Initiative: Joint initiative between TRIP (Tallaght Roma Integration Project) and Safetynet Primary Care Network, providing culturally appropriate primary medical care services to members of the Roma community.*
- *Asylum Seekers Advocacy and Support Initiative: Abbeyleix*
- *World Mental Health Day Event: Athy*
- *Mojo Mens Group: PCSW had key role in planning, development and facilitation of men's group focused on reducing suicide rates in Tallaght – Funded by NOSP, First of its kinds in Ireland, A 12 week programme, 2 mornings per week covering elements of WRAP Wellness Recovering Action Planning one morning and practical workshops from various sources on the second morning eg career planning, healthy weight management/exercise, social welfare, citizens information, volunteering etc. PCSW Role: Planning and Development of Group; Member of the Advisory Group & the Care Planning Group; Facilitation of group workshops; Link Worker to participants - Tallaght*

- *Mojo Men's Shed: Follow on to Mojo Group. PCSW facilitation of workshops at same – Tallaght*
- *Youth Diversion Project: Portarlington*
- *Development of a Social Club for Teenagers with Autism/Aspergers: Inter agency piece of work with PCSW, Foroige, Aspire and Community Parent Rep – Tallaght*
- *Roots to Empathy Programme: Worked with Schoolchildren in Athlone School*
- *Development of a Healthy Schools Programme: in partnership with local secondary school. Monthly themed health focus. Coordination of interagency inputs on various health related matters - sexual health, stress management/mental health; bullying; body image; healthy eating; In partnership with SPHE - Tallaght*
- *Monthly Carers Coffee Morning: Rialto*

Community Initiative Steering Group Membership

- *Community Development Group – Dublin North*
- *MABs Money Advice and Budgeting Service Board Member – Dublin North*
- *Blanchardstown Area Project (B.A.P.)*
- *Building Health Communities Project - Monaghan*
- *Health and Wellbeing Steering Group - Rialto*
- *Rapid Health Strategy Group - Tallaght*
- *Dual Diagnosis Forum - Tallaght*
- *Sexual Health Forum (PCSW organised workshops for professional on STIs) - Tallaght*
- *Healthy Schools Steering Committee - Tallaght*
- *Chronic Conditions Self Management Programme Steering Group - Tallaght*
- *Fettercairn Board - Tallaght*
- *Young Parents Ante Natal Group Steering Committee Member – Tallaght*

Tallaght Roma Integration Project: PCSW Member of an Inter-agency group (composed of local Roma community and professionals from the HSE, local community, South Dublin Co Council and South Dublin Co partnership) with expertise in integration, community development, primary care and Roma issues. Aims to address some of the health and social disparities experienced by the local Roma community in Tallaght.

Community/Service User Participation Work

- *Tallaght Community Health Forum – Development and supporting of same*
- *Community Participation/Services Network Meetings: PCSW attendance at Group Meetings to support services in the area to become familiar with one another and utilise each other.*
- *Older Persons Forum – Laois/Offaly*
- *Tenants Forum – Laois/Offaly*

Facilitation of Parenting Groups

- *Springstart (for parents who may not have had good experience themselves as children – focused on how to play with their children): Dublin North*
- *Six Steps Parenting Group Facilitation (Solution Focused Group): Tallaght*
- *Strengthening Families Group: Birr, Mullingar*
- *Ante-natal / support groups for pregnant teenagers: Cavan*
- *Setting up of a lapsed mother and toddler group: Cavan*
- *Parents Plus: Dublin North*
- *Triple P Positive Parenting Programme - across Laois and Offaly, first delivery of Triple P of it's kind in the world*

Improving Access to Information for the Community

- *Information Directory: Birr*
- *Young Persons' Mental Health Leaflet: Kildare*
- *Health Fairs*

Coordination, Planning & Delivery of One Off Workshops/Training

To Service Users:

- *Stress Management*
- *Anger Management*
- *Self Esteem*

To Other professionals

- *Professional Self Care*
- *SafeTalk*
- *WRAP Wellness Recovery Action Planning: 3 day Training*
- *Responding to Suicide - A Community Response*



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Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

Social Workers in Primary Care

Special Interest Group

Ed. Special Interest Group National Committee Members:

Deirdre Jacob at Deirdre.Jacob@hse.ie (Chair)

Patrice Reilly at Patrice.Reilly@hse.ie (Vice Chairperson)

Ray Parkinson at Ray.Parkinson@hse.ie (Secretary)

Sharon Flood at Sharon.Flood@hse.ie (Training Officer)