

ULUSLARARASI SOSYAL ARAŐTIRMALAR DERĐİŐİ THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL RESEARCH

Uluslararası Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi/The Journal of International Social Research

Cilt: 16 Sayı: 103 Ağustos 2023 & Volume: 16 Issue: 103 August 2023

Received: Aug 02, 2023, Manuscript No. jjsr-23-111071; Editor assigned: Aug 04, 2023, Pre-QC No. jjsr-23-111071 (PQ); Reviewed: Aug 18, 2023, QC No. jjsr-23-111071; Revised: Aug 24, 2023, Manuscript No. jjsr-23-111071 (R); Published: Aug 30, 2023, DOI: 10.17719/jjsr.2023.111071

www.sosyalarastirmalar.com ISSN: 1307-9581

Empowering Communities: Prospects for Enhanced Workforce Training in Social Prescribing

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Abstract

Social prescribing has gained significant attention as a holistic approach to healthcare that addresses not only physical ailments but also mental, emotional, and social well-being. Central to its success is the role of community empowerment and an adequately trained workforce. This review article explores the prospects of enhancing workforce training in social prescribing to empower communities and improve overall health outcomes. By examining the key components of social prescribing, current challenges, and potential benefits, this article sheds light on the pivotal role of well-trained professionals in fostering successful community-driven healthcare initiatives.

Keywords: Social prescribing, link workers, contingent valuation, skills, training.

Introduction

Social prescribing involves the referral of individuals to non-clinical interventions, such as community activities, support groups, and art programs, to improve their overall health and well-being. Unlike traditional medical interventions, social prescribing emphasizes a person-centered approach that addresses the complex interplay between physical health, mental well-being, and social determinants [1].

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The success of social prescribing relies on empowering communities to take charge of their health, and this empowerment hinges on the quality of workforce training.

A link worker (LW) is responsible for enabling and supporting an individual to assess their requirements, co-producing solutions for them and making use of appropriate local resources. Individuals who chose to use SP interventions require LWs to signpost them to various SP community activities. Taking a holistic approach in tailoring SP options to meet the requirements of individuals necessitates LWs to form relationships across a spectrum of individuals, organizations and community groups within society [2]. LWs assist patients in managing chronic illnesses by signposting patients to community healthcare services that they were previously unaware of to improve wellbeing. Tailoring patient care in SP promotes long-term wellbeing via prevention and the delaying of long-term conditions. SP was also highlighted as one of the ten high impact actions outlined to ease GP workload. SP intervention takes a number of different forms to seek solutions to meet an individual's requirements. Some of the different types of SP intervention include arts-based prescription, exercise referral and green social prescribing. This requires LWs to have a range of personal attributes along with good communication, knowledge and skills to navigate complex systems to develop social capital and the wellbeing of individuals and communities [3]. As an emerging new role, LWs are not regulated by professional bodies and there is no consistent training for LWs who are joining the practice of SP from varied backgrounds. As such, LWs have varying knowledge about how to deal with individuals with complex requirements, which can impact on their decision-making capabilities to seek solutions and navigate complex systems. Therefore, this can impact on their decision-making capabilities and influence the training which may be necessary to build confidence to seek solutions. Training to support LWs to manage complex case referral is essential. The LW title can vary depending on the type of SP intervention; these titles include community connector, wellbeing advisor and social prescriber. Although the titles can vary, there is overlap in the fundamental skills required for the role among the different titles. Recent evidence has assisted in creating internationally recognized theoretical and operational definitions of social prescribing which should be integrated into future social prescribing research and policy development. There is some supporting evidence indicating that LWs can provide unqualified specialist support to vulnerable individuals using SP interventions [4].

Key components of social prescribing

Successful social prescribing programs typically involve a collaborative effort between various stakeholders, including healthcare professionals, community organizations, local governments, and individuals seeking support. These programs are built on several key components:



Person-centered care: Central to social prescribing is the notion of person-centered care, which recognizes the individual's unique needs, preferences, and circumstances. Well-trained professionals are equipped to engage patients in meaningful conversations, identify their underlying issues, and tailor interventions accordingly [5].

Multidisciplinary collaboration: Social prescribing often requires collaboration among different disciplines, such as healthcare providers, social workers, psychologists, and community organizers. Effective communication and interdisciplinary training enable professionals to work cohesively, providing comprehensive support to individuals.

Community resources: Community resources, such as local clubs, support groups, and recreational activities, play a crucial role in social prescribing. Workforce training should emphasize awareness of available resources and the skills needed to connect patients with relevant community programs [6].

Current challenges in workforce training

While the potential benefits of social prescribing are evident, there are challenges related to workforce training that need to be addressed:

Limited standardization: Workforce training in social prescribing lacks standardized guidelines and qualifications, leading to variations in the quality of care provided. Establishing consistent training frameworks and competencies is essential to ensure a skilled and effective workforce [7].

Interdisciplinary skills: Social prescribing demands professionals with a diverse skill set, including communication, cultural competency, and knowledge of community resources. Training programs must incorporate interdisciplinary education to prepare professionals for collaborative practice.

Keeping pace with innovation: As social prescribing continues to evolve, incorporating technological advancements and innovative intervention methods is crucial [8]. Workforce training should cover digital health tools, data privacy considerations, and virtual engagement strategies.

Prospects for enhanced workforce training

Enhancing workforce training can significantly contribute to the success of social prescribing initiatives:

Standardized curriculum: Developing a standardized curriculum for social prescribing training would establish a consistent baseline of knowledge and skills across professionals. This could involve academic



institutions, professional associations, and governmental bodies collaborating to define core competencies [9].

Continuing education: Continuing education programs can ensure that professionals stay updated on the latest trends, research, and best practices in social prescribing. This approach would facilitate ongoing skill development and adaptation to changing healthcare landscapes.

Cultural sensitivity: Training should emphasize cultural sensitivity and the importance of tailoring interventions to diverse populations. This approach would enhance engagement and effectiveness while reducing health disparities [10].

Conclusion

Empowering communities through social prescribing necessitates a well-prepared and skilled workforce. Enhanced training that addresses the multifaceted nature of social prescribing, promotes interdisciplinary collaboration, and adapts to evolving healthcare trends can amplify the positive impact of community-driven interventions. As the concept of healthcare expands beyond clinical settings, investing in workforce training becomes paramount for the realization of holistic well-being.

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