



Department
of Health



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adass
adult social services

Social Work: Essential to Integration

Advice Note

March 2017

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| DH ID box |
| Title: Social Work: Essential to Integration |
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| Document Purpose: Advice Note |
| Publication date: February 2017 |
| Target audience: All social workers and local authorities including Principal Social Workers, senior managers and Directors of Adult Social Services. |
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Summary

Social work is essential to integration, to support the social model and social care alongside the medical model and treatment. Social work enables people to be included in work and communities. It safeguards their rights when doctors are considering compulsory admission or treatment, when they may be at risk of deprivation of their liberty or when they have experienced abuse or neglect.

1. Introduction

This Advice Note is the product of a collaboration between the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS), the Chief Social Worker for Adults, and the Principal Social Workers' Network¹. It aims to support and inform local and regional health and social care integration initiatives by explaining the critical contribution that social workers make to integrated services. It describes the necessity of support to ensure integration succeeds in providing the services that local people need. We have learnt from previous experience of integrated services and multi-professional teams that the contributions of all professionals should be valued, and in order to value the role that social workers make, their unique contribution should be understood and promoted. We need to show how social work is essential to the whole system, not just their specific skills, knowledge and competencies in their areas of practice. This Advice Note contains 'Top Tips' for Directors of Adult Social Services and also 'Top Tips' for Principal Social Workers to assist in progressing the integration agenda.

Context

Transformation of health and social care recognises that no single part of the system can deliver effectively in isolation. Greater integration of acute, community, mental health, primary health, and social care services aims to halt the increasing reliance on hospitals and deliver more support in the community. This requires the social care and health system to maximise their social work resource to where it can have most impact. The key roles and contributions that social workers make to an integrated health and care system are: to improve outcomes for people; protect people appropriately; and maximise the effectiveness of expenditure across health and care overall by undertaking a rights, strengths, and co-production approach to creative and innovative ways of improving people's lives.

There is a continuing national imperative to work towards achieving social care and health Integration². There is emerging evidence of the value of a broader social work offer in the new care models, for example through Vanguard sites, in hospital discharge, and working alongside GPs. Social workers address the practical, social, and emotional issues that affect a person's health and wellbeing, manage risk, support independence, and coordinate care to keep people at home.³

Social workers and social care must play a vital role in these changing arrangements so that the whole system approach to working with people, their families, and communities really will deliver better outcomes and make best use of available public resources and people's own strengths and assets. There are some key lessons from previous and existing integrated arrangements, which we can build upon. Effective integration requires the creation of well-functioning teams comprised of a range of different professionals. While multi-professional

¹ ADASS and the Department of Health held a seminar on 21st October 2016 for ADASS members and Principal Social Workers 'to demonstrate the critical value that social work brings to an integrated health and social care system in order to develop a clearer narrative for the benefits of integration generally'. The output from the seminar has informed this document.

² See L.G.A. et al (2016) *Stepping up to the place*

³ Lyn Romeo (2016) *Annual Report by the Chief Social Worker for Adults 2015-16* pp.15-16

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teams have always existed, the new integration agenda requires heightened levels of cooperation, communication and coordination.⁴

Alongside this, integration is happening in a context of continued austerity, where further efficiencies are required alongside increasing demand, complexity of need, and expectations from those needing care and support. This will continue to create challenges for delivery across health and adult social care systems.

⁴ Cameron et al, (2012) cited *Research in Practice for Adults 2015*

2. What works in integrated approaches?

The ability of different professionals and agencies to work together is critical to the success of integration. We know from experience that when integrated health and care organisations have disintegrated it is because social care outcomes have deteriorated or because safeguarding has had insufficient attention. Ensuring that the social and the medical are balanced is critical. Research published by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)⁵ has identified those broad factors that can help or hinder the integration of multi-professional teams: organisational, cultural and professional, and contextual. It seems that the success of multi-professional teams depends upon developing clear aims and a commitment to shared values and outcomes. Aims and outcomes must be relevant to individuals and their carers – even if they differ from organisational policy and practice; and individuals and their carers should therefore be closely involved in choosing between care options and be given control over how they progress.⁶

⁵ Cameron et al, (2015)

⁶ *Research in Practice for Adults 2015*

3. What do social workers bring into integrated approaches?

Personalised and strengths based practice

Social workers can deliver the broad continuum of Care Act 2014 responsibilities, working with people across the spectrum of wellbeing, prevention, care and support. They bring ‘a whole person’ approach, focussing on the person in their life (not as a category /label of an illness or a condition or a disability), promoting their human rights, what matters to them, their voice, ambitions, and self-determination. Social workers have a comprehensive view of the person’s needs, how they are being met and what the gaps are.

Social workers promote strength or asset based approaches in their work, looking to identify what the individual, their family and networks can bring, working to achieve the specific personalised outcomes for that individual (rather than tasks). They mobilise community resources to support and protect, they ‘do “with” not “to”’. They promote the role of the citizen verses ‘expert’. They aim to build resilience both for people and communities. Social workers use solution focused techniques to promote change in peoples’ lives.

Social workers bring a strong set of social work values into practice: they understand, emphasise, and apply the broader social model rather than just relying on the medical model for understanding the person and their situations. Social workers apply knowledge of systems thinking, use relationship focused approaches and techniques to enable individuals to change, manage their lives and protect themselves. They can see beyond professional networks and systems, bringing an outward view of the world.

Team around the person

Social workers can marshal their professional and relational skills to ensure effective and coordinated responses delivered by ‘teams around the person’. This means that, as advocates, they can help to break down bureaucratic barriers that often stand in the way of people receiving the care they want; capture and communicate peoples own understanding of prevention and early intervention with other team members; work with people to build care and support that meets individual needs and goals, provide ongoing and flexible monitoring of care development and impacts, and keep other team members up-to-date with progress or setbacks.⁷ They have a good understanding of the cost and value of care and/or support to inform and advise options and choices for people.

Social workers can:

- build on professional differences to promote better outcomes for people
- promote social, rights based perspectives within ‘teams around the person’ as well as traditional care co-ordination roles
- promote opportunities for innovation

⁷ Ripfa 2015

What do social workers bring into integrated approaches?

- position themselves within multi-professional teams as experts with deep knowledge of what people want, and how this can be delivered.⁸

Managing risk and uncertainty

Social workers bring a risk enabling and risk taking approach alongside risk management, mitigation or containment, especially working in adult safeguarding, where they aim to achieve resolution and recovery for the person affected. They can work with the complexities of supporting/enabling the person to make their own decisions about risk, and promote self-determination to achieve recovery and resolution. They bring a willingness to support personal growth by 'enabling people to make mistakes' or cope with 'unwise decisions'. They can help manage professionals' anxieties that lead to risk adverse behaviours and can challenge this through a shift in practice from a focus on protection processes to achieving peoples own outcomes. Social workers are often seen as the lead practitioners in safeguarding but this responsibility needs to be balanced and shared. Social workers have expertise rather than being the 'experts'.

Social workers bring awareness and use of legal frameworks in their responses and actions: legal literacy and how to apply a range of legislation and legal tools in individual situations. They are not lawyers, but work within a range of legal frameworks. As Best Interests Assessors and Approved Mental Health Professionals, they exercise specific legal roles under the Mental Health and Mental Capacity Acts.

Social workers bring emotional literacy. They can manage complex emotional situations and reactions and understand how this impacts on themselves and others' responses and actions. They can recognise when their own practice is affected and deal with the emotional impact of the work as well as understanding and working with the anxiety of other professionals and people involved through their reflective practice.

Confidence and challenge

Social workers can bring a healthy challenge within systems, and in decision making if they are confident in their own role. They can lead shared learning opportunities, case discussions, and constructively challenge other professionals. Social workers provide an independent perspective or have an independent voice in some roles, supporting people who use care and health services. They play a vital role in upholding the rights of people who use services.⁹

⁸ *Research in Practice for Adults 2015*

⁹ *BASW, 2016*

4. What can support social work in integrated approaches?

We have learnt from previous experiences that there are some key factors that support social work in integrated approaches, whatever model is developed:

- the social work contribution must be clear, captured, and communicated, so that there is a good understanding of its necessity: this should be across all levels from practice to strategy;
- professional leadership and supervision in social work (including reflective practice) is critical alongside line management. Coaching and mentoring can support professional development (where mental health services have successfully developed mental health social work there is social work leadership across the system, outcomes are right and very clearly spelt out);
- senior support and influence across the system is important – senior managers with a social background can ensure a strong social work value base is integrated into arrangements, and a focus on what matters to people;
- promoting a positive narrative through ‘good news’ stories celebrating success, posters in Multi-disciplinary Teams, talking about and demonstrating what difference social work makes;
- performance monitoring focusing on personal outcomes as well as quantitative performance data is more likely to evidence the social work contribution to improving people’s lives;
- inter-disciplinary or integrated training, for example to develop a shared approach to risk (e.g. Examples of good practice from Torbay Foundation Trust — Academic module for decisions about safeguarding to shift a risk averse culture).

Having these enablers in place will ensure social work flourishes in integrated settings.

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6. Top Tips

Top tip for Directors of Adult Social Services

- Promote social workers and support the social work role in integrated approaches.

Promote social work as critical to delivering the new service models and approaches. Ensure that everyone is aware of the contribution social workers can make – set out their roles, functions and added value. (Ask -In what ways can your models of integration ensure the visibility of social work? Any initiative which helps communicate their presence across all leadership is important. All too often the work social workers do as part of integration is assumed rather than celebrated. Methods which help ensure visibility include: giving social workers the opportunity to present their experiences and share their knowledge at leadership meetings; and embedding social work case studies into any integration reporting.)

- Promote the social model and a human rights approach to health and social care in integration conversations where the local authority is required to endorse proposals for change.

Ensure that social models of care, and the roles social workers play, are given the same level of visibility across all integration activity - making a case for a visible and strong social care presence that is not side-lined in favour of more medicalised approaches. The emphasis in the Care Act 2014 itself is for person-centred care and social workers play a key role in ensuring the whole person is taken into consideration.

- Ensure a clear focus on social work in any governance arrangements

Ensure that governance arrangements support social work professional leadership and demonstrate a commitment to excellent social work practice. Ensure that performance management systems and monitoring arrangements capture social work and social care outcomes as part of integrated arrangements, i.e. how lives are changed for the better. Ensure that there are clear lines of accountability back to the local authority so that statutory duties and responsibilities are appropriately met.

- Stronger together – recognise that each contribution from different professionals brings value to the outcomes for people

Be aware that successful integration requires an appreciation of the different working practices, professional cultures and identities of those included. Promoting the specific contribution of social work alongside other professional identities and cultures should pre-empt protectionism. (E.g. look at how issues of professional identity, culture and protectionism are being addressed in your area and what mechanisms are in place to break down barriers between different professional groups? Examples of good practice include: - coordinated and regular role shadowing - joint training programmes between staff of different employment sectors actively encouraging the sharing of information and co-producing findings.)

- Value and support the Principal Social Worker

As the Principal Social Worker (PSW) role is to promote and lead good practice, Directors of Adult Social Services (DASSs) need to value and support them to deliver their objectives in developing excellent practice, and a confident and effective social work workforce.

Top Tips for Principal Social Workers

- Provide evidence to the DASS of how social workers can contribute to shaping and delivering new integrated service models.
- Support and influence middle management in service improvement to improve standards and achieve consistency of practice – ‘Social work needs to own its own performance’
- Promote and support the development of front line social workers through creating learning opportunities from practice, peer supervision and input into professional education so that they are confident in multi-professional settings.
- Always ensure that the person is at the centre – ‘the goal of integration is not an end in itself but a route towards person-centred outcomes’¹⁰ .
- Influence and impress NHS colleagues with the positive contributions social work can make to improving lives.

¹⁰ Shaw et al, 2011 cited *Research in Practice for Adults 2015*