

Analysis of the Current Situation of Service Capacity of Medical Social Workers in Shanxi Province and the Conception of Cultivation Pathway

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Abstract: *Objective:* This study aims to analyze the current status of service competence of medical social workers in Shanxi Province and to conceptualize the cultivation path. *Methods:* A questionnaire survey was conducted among 88 staff members and 120 residents of eight community health service centers in Shanxi Province to understand the population's knowledge of the connotation of medical social workers and their needs. *Results:* Currently, the staff and residents of the community health service centers in Shanxi Province have a low level of knowledge and a high demand for medical social workers. It is recommended to expand the scope of practice of medical school students and design a series of training programs for medical social workers to better meet the needs of community healthcare and promote the implementation of the Healthy China Strategy.

Keywords: Community health service center; Medical social worker; Training pathway

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1. Introduction

With the booming social and economic development and the improvement of living standards, the public's demand for health has also increased, and the concept of health development is also changing. People not only want to reduce the rate of disease, but also want to obtain information on disease prevention and rehabilitation to achieve the purpose of "preventing disease before it occurs, and preventing change when it occurs." The 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of Health Care Personnel proposes the development of community health workers and medical social workers, and the mobilization of social forces to participate in community health work, carry out humanistic care, and provide social support. Medical social workers are "the doctor's assistant,

the patient's friend, the guardian of family health, the manager of patients with chronic diseases, the partner of other professionals and technicians, and an important member of the modern health care system" [1]. In Western countries, medical social work has become an important part of the healthcare system, and its role covers psychological support, disease management, and many other aspects. However, in China, its development is still in its infancy, and medical social workers are better developed in first-tier cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, while the western region is relatively lagging, and there is a serious loss of this type of talent [2]. This is especially true in provinces such as Shanxi, which has a vast territory and uneven economic development, the service capacity and training path of medical social workers are facing many challenges. This study aims to identify the key influencing factors on the service competence of medical social workers in Shanxi province through a systematic analysis of the current situation and put forward suggestions to optimize the training paths, enhance the overall service level of medical social workers, and thus promote the improvement of healthcare service quality in Shanxi province and the whole country.

2. Survey objects and methods

2.1. Survey objects

Through the random sampling method, 88 staff members of 8 community health service centers and 120 residents under the jurisdiction of 8 community health service centers in Shanxi Province were surveyed.

2.2. Content of the survey

The researcher designed the questionnaire through literature review, expert consultation, and pre-survey. The questionnaire has 10 entries including basic information, each with 2–6 options, and the content is mainly to understand the knowledge, demand, service evaluation, management, and input of community staff and residents on medical social workers.

3. Results

3.1. General information

The survey included 88 community staff members, consisting of 34 males and 54 females; aged 24 and above. Their education levels consisted of 11 in secondary school, 21 in college, and 56 with bachelor's degrees. There are 36 in administrative positions, 20 as doctors, and 32 as nurses. Their working years consisted of 26 with 1–5 years, 16 with 6–8 years, and 46 with more than 8 years. The actual number of residents surveyed was 120, consisting of 55 men and 65 women; aged 32–78; with 72 active staff and 48 retirees. Their literacy level consisted of 12 in primary school and below, 17 in junior high school, 28 in high school and middle school, 21 in junior college, 34 in undergraduate, and 8 in postgraduate.

3.2. Perceptions and needs of community staff and residents for medical social workers (MSW) services

The perceptions and needs of community staff and residents for medical social workers (MSW) services are shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Community staff and residents' perceptions and needs for medical social worker services

| Content of Entries | Survey results | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Option A | Option B | Option C | Option D | Option E | Option F |
| 1. Do you know about medical social workers? | Very unaware 29.9% | Don not know 53.9% | Fairly aware 10% | Understood 6.2% | Very well 0% | |
| 2. Do you think it is necessary to introduce medical social worker service in community health service centers under the current medical environment? | Very unnecessary 1.4% | Unnecessary 7.7% | General 34.6% | Necessary 46.2% | Very necessary 10.1% | |
| 3. Do you know whether there is any medical social worker service in the service center at present? | Very unaware 5.8% | Not known 46.2% | General knowledge 30.3% | Understood 14.4% | Very well known 3.3% | |
| 4. Have you ever received medical social worker service? | No 94.2% | Yes 5.8% | | | | |
| 5. What kind of services do you think medical social workers can provide? | Provision of psychological counseling to community residents 36.5% | Providing financial assistance to residents in financial difficulties 99.5% | Carrying out health promotion activities such as free clinics 99% | Regular follow-up of residents' health status 77.9% | Others 17.3% | |
| 6. How much do you know about the channels for obtaining medical social worker services? | Not sure 26.9% | Very poorly understood 33.6% | Do not know 29.8% | Fairly know 5.4% | Understood 4.3% | Very well understood 0% |
| 7. Are you willing to join the medical social worker team? | Very reluctant 13% | Unwilling 12% | Fair 62% | Willing 9.2% | Very willing 3.8% | |
| 8. What qualities and abilities do you think medical social workers should have? | Healthcare knowledge 96.1% | Communication skills 63% | Psychological counselling ability 52% | Ability to integrate resources 33.6% | Organizational planning ability 46.6% | Others 8.6% |
| 9. What kind of training do you think medical social workers should receive? | Knowledge of medical physiology 96.6% | Communication skills 47.6% | Counseling skills 62.5% | Resource integration skills 41.3% | Management skills 67.8% | Others 3% |
| 10. What kind of input do you think should be increased in the MSW program? | Training funding 95.2% | Economic assistance support 97.1% | Policy support 94.7% | Publicity strength 96.6% | Project funding 92.8% | |

4. Discussion

4.1. Analysis of community staff and residents' perception of and demand for medical social work services

With the need for social development and the improvement of human civilization, there is a need for medical service resources to sink, and in the last decade or so, municipal tertiary hospitals in Shanxi Province have been regularly sent to county hospitals in the province to provide precise assistance. In the course of the precision support work, the researcher has gained a certain understanding of the situation of the staff of the local community health service centers and the connotation of their services, and is expected to look forward

to the implementation of the concept of “small illnesses go to the community, big illnesses go to the hospital.” This study investigated the current situation of medical social workers in Shanxi Province. As seen in **Table 1**, community staff and residents do not have a high degree of understanding of medical social workers, with 29.95 percent of them indicating that they are very unaware of them, 53.9 percent indicating that they do not know much about them, 10 percent indicating that they know much about them, and only 6.2 percent of them knowing much about them. However, both community staff and residents have high expectations and recognition of the connotations associated with MSW services, with 56.3% believing that there is a need to introduce MSWs. 99.5% of the personnel believe that MSWs can provide financial assistance to residents with financial difficulties, and 99% believe that there is a need to carry out health promotion activities such as voluntary medical consultations. It is learned in the questionnaire survey that the provision of psychological counseling accounted for only 36.5%, which can be seen as the community staff recognition is also limited, but, as currently known, whether it is to overcome the beliefs of the disease or medical economic burden, psychological counseling play a role in the case of many cases, so it can be seen that the next step to stabilize emotions, solve problems, and enhance the ability of anti-stress is the direction of the focus of the efforts of the medical social workers to give residents psychological counseling at different times of the three-tier prevention, comprehensive multiple disciplines such as medicine, sociology, and psychology^[3]. In this regard, humanistic care and skillful communication skills are indispensable, as can be seen in **Table 1**, 63% of the personnel in the area of communication skills have a favorable attitude, and should focus on communication skills for training.

Table 1 shows that the willingness of community workers and residents to join the medical social work team is not very strong, 62% said that it is average, which may be related to the low level of understanding of medical social work. As high as 96% of the survey respondents believe that medical social workers should have knowledge of medical and health care, which shows that they believe that it is very necessary to have solid knowledge of this field. To better support the development of medical social work, the government should further improve the relevant policies. 94.7% of the respondents in **Table 1** believe that strong government support is needed to increase the investment in medical social workers, including training funds, professional certification systems, and policy incentives. At the same time, the working conditions and career development prospects of medical social workers should also be enhanced within medical institutions by strengthening the integration of internal resources.

4.2. Analysis and conceptualization of the current situation of medical social worker training paths

4.2.1. Status quo of medical social worker training paths

By analyzing the current situation of the service capacity of medical social workers in Shanxi Province, this study has identified the main problems and bottlenecks that currently exist. The study shows that only through systematic policy support, continuous education and training, and effective resource integration can the service capacity of medical social workers be truly enhanced.

In terms of major cities across the country, Beijing provides services such as hospice care and oncology recovery to the community in a more integrated mode of operation and encourages the active development of standardized projects for medical social workers. Tianjin practices the concept of specialized work services more thoroughly by adding new social worker positions and recruiting full-time and part-time staff to participate in dispute mediation and other work^[4]. In short, China’s medical social work is still in its infancy

in terms of policy protection, talent team building, and specialization ^[5-6]. The current status of development and existing dilemmas are as follows. Although there has been great progress in terms of policy protection, it is still far from enough for the needs of development ^[7]. The lack of policy has led to the highly unbalanced development of medical social work among regions in China, and the quality of services varies due to the lack of uniform normative standards ^[8]. Restricted space for career development has seriously affected the development of medical social work ^[9]. As for the construction of a talent team, medical social work is a job that requires professional theoretical knowledge and rich practical ability, but there is a disconnect between the professionals cultivated by higher education institutions and the ability requirements of medical social work positions. At present, only China Medical University, Shanxi Medical University, and other colleges and universities have set up medical social work majors. This kind of generalist education has resulted in a lack of “specialists” in medical social work ^[10-11]. Because they cannot carry out appropriate professional services, some medical social workers can only carry out basic work in hospitals, and once more specialized roles are required, they will fall into the predicament of insufficient manpower and lack of role practice ^[12]. Methods to strengthen the cultivation of medical social work personnel involve a variety of issues, such as policy support, medical school penetration, and other aspects ^[13].

4.2.2. Conceptualization of medical social worker training paths

According to incomplete statistics, there are more than ten medical schools in this province, and the number of students enrolled in each major institution varies, taking Shanxi Medical University as an example, with an enrolment of 5,180 students in 2024. In recent years, medical school students in a year of clinical practice, some institutions will set up volunteer services, mainly in the outpatient clinic building on how to pay the bill, check the orientation of the Q&A, and so on. Although the students experience a certain degree of humanistic care, this initiative is still relatively single and limited. If institutional counselors allocate human resources scientifically and reasonably, so that students go deep into the corresponding community, the institutions do a good job of investigating in advance, planned training, a series of targeted training and education, the establishment of a benign mechanism, and constantly improve their medical literacy and communication skills, and so on. A variety of ways are used to evaluate the effectiveness of training, such as community residents' salon symposiums, questionnaire star answers, and case simulation exercises. In this way, the knowledge learned by the students not only stays in the classroom books, but also can be transformed into easy-to-understand language for the general public in need of medical knowledge, and theories linked to the practice of better use in the work of community health care services.

5. Summary and prospects

The limitation of this study mainly lies in the geographical restriction of the sample, which covers the major cities and districts in Shanxi Province but is still insufficient to represent the current situation of medical social workers in the province. In addition, this study mainly used the questionnaire survey method and did not take in-depth interviews and other qualitative research to do more perfect research work. An in-depth study of the implementation of the effect of different training paths can be conducted to provide a more specific basis for the development of policy and practice in Shanxi Province.

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