A retrospective review of the after-hours social work service in a tertiary-care public hospital

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Aim: We investigated the patient characteristics and types of SW interventions provided to patients who received an after-hours SW service and the effect of providing these services on the service-provider.

Methods: A retrospective review of the summary data collected on patients who had received an after-hours SW service over a 3-year period in a tertiary-care, public hospital (Royal Adelaide Hospital) was undertaken.

Results: 172 occasions of service were provided by 14 social workers, mostly to patients/families in the ED (71%) or ICU (23%) following trauma (52%) or with a medical condition (38%). Counselling for trauma, grief or loss were the type of interventions most frequently provided and most often involved the patient and family members (77%). Interventions were most frequently rated by the SW-provider as highly complex and imperative.
At times, providing the after-hours service negatively impacted on the service-provider the following day, with tiredness and hyper-vigilance most frequently reported.

Conclusions: An after-hours SW service within a tertiary-care hospital was provided approximately 5 times/month, predominantly involved crisis interventions and counselling to patients/families in the ED or ICU and rated as highly complex and imperative. Providing such services had, at times, negative impacts on the service-provider the following day. These results provide evidence, albeit anecdotal, that an after-hours SW service is of value in this setting.

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