

**SOCIAL WORK IN HOSPITALS: PRACTICE AT CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL 2*****Thai NgocTram**

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Abstract

The article provides an in-depth analysis of the role, content, and implementation methods of social work in hospitals, with a focus on the practice at Children's Hospital 2. Through practical surveys and quantitative analysis, the research shows that social work has played a significant role in supporting pediatric patients and their families, reducing the burden on medical staff, and enhancing the overall quality of healthcare services. However, the implementation process still faces several challenges such as a lack of dedicated staff, limited interdisciplinary coordination, and uneven awareness among doctors, medical staff, and patients' families about the role of social work. In particular, given that the hospital is a central facility receiving a large number of pediatric patients from various provinces, the pressure on psychological counseling, economic support, and post-treatment care orientation further emphasizes the need for professionalization in social work. In response to these challenges, the article proposes several strategic solutions, including: improving the organizational model of social work in hospitals, enhancing training and professional development for social work staff, promoting the use of information technology in managing and connecting patient support services, and increasing awareness and skills for interdisciplinary coordination within the hospital environment. These solutions aim to professionalize and sustainably develop social work in healthcare, particularly in central pediatric hospitals.

Keywords: Social work, Children's Hospital 2.

INTRODUCTION**Ask the problem**

In the context of the healthcare industry gradually modernizing with a patient-centered approach, social work in hospitals is no longer just a supportive activity but has become a crucial professional component, contributing to enhancing the quality of comprehensive healthcare. Especially in specialized hospitals like Children's Hospital 2, which receives a large number of pediatric patients from various regions, social work plays a key role in providing psychological support, connecting resources, counseling, and addressing social issues that arise during the treatment process.

President Ho Chi Minh once emphasized: "A good doctor is like a compassionate mother" [1], affirming that medical ethics is not only about medical expertise but also about empathy, dedication, and serving patients as if they were family. In this spirit, social work serves as a bridge between medicine and humanity, between the hospital and the community, helping to realize the ideal of "healing the sick and saving lives" in a comprehensive way physically, mentally, and socially. Recognizing the importance of this, in recent years, Children's Hospital 2 has focused on strengthening its social work department, gradually building a team of dedicated professionals, and implementing various support models for pediatric patients and their families, such as providing psychological support for children with serious illnesses, mobilizing financial resources, and organizing communication, counseling, and health education activities. However, in practice, social work in hospitals still faces many challenges: the staff is thin and not well-trained, the coordination between departments and the social work department is not tight, the

awareness of medical staff and patients about the role of social work is still limited, and the resources for support are still largely dependent on external fundraising activities rather than a sustainable financial mechanism. Given this situation, there is an urgent need for Children's Hospital 2 and the public healthcare system in general to innovate the organizational model, activities, and methods of implementing social work in a professional, effective manner that meets practical needs. Standardizing job positions, enhancing training for healthcare social workers, applying technology in management and care, and building interdisciplinary support networks are directions that need to be implemented comprehensively and sustainably. To achieve this, close coordination is required between the hospital's management board, health sector management agencies, social work training institutions, and charitable organizations. Each hospital must recognize social work as an integral part of the treatment process, inseparable from clinical medicine; at the same time, management units need to establish appropriate legal frameworks and financial mechanisms to create conditions for social work to develop sustainably, meeting the increasing demands of modern society. In conclusion, the development of social work in hospitals is not only an inevitable requirement of the healthcare sector in the reform process but also a concrete manifestation of a humanistic, modern, and comprehensive healthcare system. The practical research at Children's Hospital 2 will help clarify the role, challenges, and development direction of this field in the new context.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**Looking back at the views of previous authors**

Social work in hospitals plays an important role in supporting patients, their families, and reducing pressure on healthcare staff, contributing to enhancing the quality of healthcare

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services and promoting comprehensive health care. According to Pham Tien Nam in the article “Social Work in Hospitals” (2019), hospital social work includes intervention methods, skills, and practices aimed at helping patients overcome psychological and social difficulties during treatment [2]. Based on this theory, Doan Kim Thang (2010) in the article “Social Work in Hospitals: Concepts and Basic Approaches” also emphasizes the necessity of building a theoretical foundation and scientific approach to develop the profession of social work within Vietnam's healthcare system [3]. Many studies have focused on surveying public awareness and the extent to which people engage with social work teams in hospitals. Nguyen Thanh Phong and Tran Kim Ngoc, in the article “Public Awareness of Social Work Teams in Hospitals” (2019), show that most patients and their families do not fully understand the role and function of the hospital's social work team and often confuse their activities with charity work [4]. This viewpoint is reinforced by surveys conducted at Dong Thap and Vinh Long General Hospitals, which reveal that social work activities in hospitals are still not widely recognized within the community. Other studies have delved into the responsiveness and effectiveness of social work services in hospitals.

In the article “The Responsiveness of Social Work Services in Hospitals to Patient Needs in Central and Local Hospitals” by Dang Kim Khanh Ly, it is assessed that although the development project for the social work profession in healthcare (2011–2020) has achieved positive results, there is still a gap between expectations and the actual service provision. The diverse needs of patients, especially vulnerable groups, remain inadequately addressed [5]. Case studies at specific hospitals further clarify the role and effectiveness of hospital social work. In the article “Social Work Activities at Bach Mai Hospital” (Nguyen ThiThoa, 2019) [6] and “The Role of Social Workers in Social Work Activities at Bach Mai Hospital” (Vu Ngoc Anh Thu, 2018) [7], the authors analyze the intervention role of social workers through group activities, individual support, resource connection, and propose solutions to enhance the effectiveness of work in the tertiary hospital environment. Similarly, HuynhThiBich Phung, in the article “The Role of Social Workers at KhanhHoa General Hospital” (2020), clarifies the specific tasks performed by social workers while highlighting challenges related to workforce and inter-agency coordination [8].

In addition to general studies, many works have focused on personal social work practices for specific patient groups. For example, Do Quynh Anh (2019) in the article “Personal Social Work in Supporting Pituitary Tumor Patients at the Endocrinology Department, Bach Mai Hospital” describes the intervention process for patients with chronic severe diseases [9], while Tran Thi Anh Dai (2019) in “Personal Social Work in Supporting the Elderly at the Rehabilitation Center, Bach Mai Hospital” emphasizes the role of social work in improving the quality of life for the elderly [10]. Notably, research such as that by Nguyen Hong Ngoc with the article “Personal Social Work Supporting Patients with Lumbar Nerve Root Treatment at the Traditional Medicine Department, Ha Dong General Hospital” (2024) [11] and Dao Ngoc Tram in the article “Personal Social Work in Providing Psychological-Social Support for Pediatric Blood Cancer Patients” (2019) has applied theories and social work procedures to support patients both mentally, socially, and in terms of future orientation [12].

Moreover, research in district-level hospitals also reflects the diverse needs and levels of patient access to social work. The article “Social Work in Supporting Patients” at Dong Anh General Hospital shows that patients, particularly those with diabetes, have a significant need for treatment counseling, health insurance rights, and psychological support, with high levels of satisfaction with counseling services across many indicators [13]. Overall, these studies show that while social work in hospitals in Vietnam has made significant progress, it still faces many challenges regarding social awareness, human resources, operational mechanisms, and the extent to which patient needs are met. Therefore, continuing to improve the model, enhancing the quality of training, and increasing communication to raise awareness of the role of hospital social work is an essential direction in the near future.

Conceptual manipulation

In the article “Social Work in Hospitals: Practices at Children's Hospital 2,” the basic concepts that need to be clarified include: 1) Social work; 2) Social work in hospitals; and 3) Social work in hospitals: Practices at Children's Hospital 2. Regarding social work, it is a humanitarian profession carried out through specialized methods aimed at supporting individuals, groups, and communities to overcome life challenges. Social work helps individuals develop their self-capacity, enhance social adaptability, and improve quality of life. In the context of modern society, social work increasingly affirms its role in addressing social issues, mitigating risks, and promoting social justice. Regarding social work in hospitals, it is the professional intervention process of social workers aimed at supporting patients and their families to overcome psychological, social, and financial difficulties arising during medical treatment. This activity includes psychological counseling, information support, resource connection, and inter-agency coordination, thereby improving the quality of treatment and ensuring the rights of patients. Social work in hospitals not only supports patients but also helps reduce the workload of medical staff, moving toward a comprehensive, humane, and effective healthcare model. From these concepts, we can form a central concept: social work in hospitals: Practices at Children's Hospital 2, which involves applying social work in the hospital environment, especially at Children's Hospital 2, where the focus is primarily on children and their families during the treatment process. The social work model at this hospital not only focuses on supporting patients physically but also includes psychological interventions, emotional support, and connecting necessary medical and social services to help patients and families overcome difficulties. The development of social work at Children's Hospital 2 reflects the humane aspect of healthcare, contributing to improved treatment effectiveness and creating a friendly treatment environment that reduces patient stress.

Research methods

The author used a quantitative method through a survey with a questionnaire. The research using the survey method with a questionnaire is described as follows:

1. Sampling process: The author applied a non-probability sampling method with a total of 120 participants, including healthcare staff and patients or their family members at Children's Hospital 2.

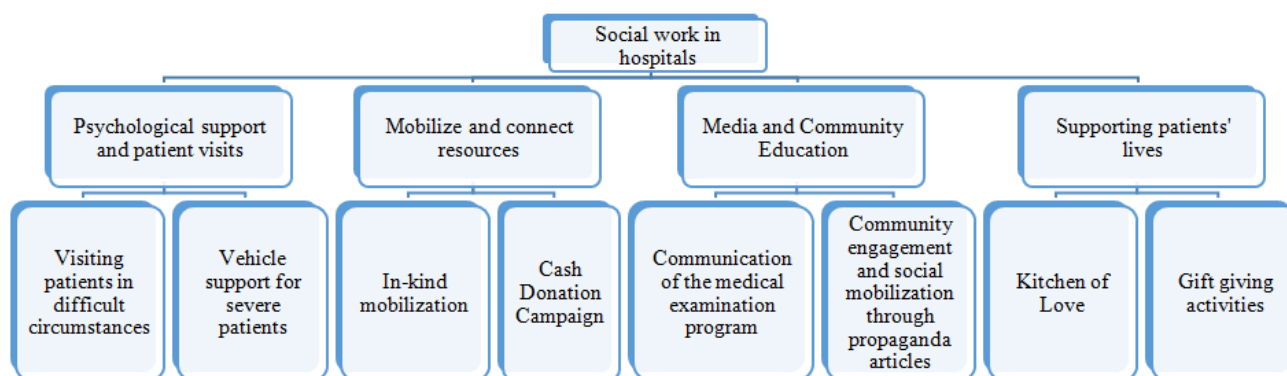


Figure 1. Social work in hospitals

2. Questionnaire design: The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first part collects information about the characteristics of the respondents. The second part focuses on the content of the survey regarding the implementation of social work in the hospital at Children's Hospital 2.
3. Respondents: To ensure the reliability and representativeness of the information, the survey subjects include healthcare staff directly involved in social work (such as social workers, doctors, nurses) and patients or their family members who have had direct experience with the social work services at the hospital.
4. Data processing: After conducting the survey, the questionnaires were checked, coded, cleaned, and entered into the system. The survey data was processed and analyzed using SPSS software version 20.0 according to the research requirements of the study.

Research questions and research hypotheses

Research Question: How is social work currently implemented at Children's Hospital 2? What factors affect the effectiveness of social work implementation at the hospital, including organizational structure, staff capacity, interdepartmental coordination, and supporting infrastructure? What solutions need to be implemented to enhance the quality of social work activities in the hospital, contributing to comprehensive support for patients and their families?

Research Hypothesis: Social work in hospitals is increasingly playing an important role in supporting patients and their families, contributing to improving the quality of comprehensive care at Children's Hospital 2. However, the effectiveness of social work activities is influenced by many factors such as an unsynchronized organizational model, a shortage of dedicated staff, limitations in the professional competence and practical skills of social workers, and the level of coordination among departments in the hospital. Improving the effectiveness of social work requires increased resource investment, standardization of operational procedures, development of professional skills for staff, and promoting tight interdepartmental coordination, thereby better meeting the psychological and social support needs of patients in the context of modern healthcare.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research results

Social work at Children's Hospital 2 plays an important role in supporting patients and their families to overcome difficulties

during the treatment process. Activities such as psychological support, patient visits, mobilizing and connecting resources, along with communication programs, help alleviate the mental and financial burdens on patients. Particularly, the attention given to children and families in difficult circumstances reflects the hospital's deep humanistic values. Social work not only provides material support but also focuses on the emotional aspect, helping to improve the quality of treatment. In doing so, the social work model at the hospital has contributed to enhancing healthcare effectiveness, affirming its essential role in the modern healthcare system. The survey results on social work at Children's Hospital 2 show a high level of appreciation from both groups of respondents: healthcare staff and patients/families. This reflects the effectiveness and practical role of social work activities in the pediatric hospital environment today. With statistically significant differences ($P = 0.001$), social work activities are not only diverse in content but also tailored to the real needs of patients, especially children and families in difficult circumstances. However, the differences in the level of evaluation between healthcare staff and patients/families may stem from factors such as the degree of direct exposure to social work, awareness of the need for support, and real-life experiences during the treatment process. Among the various activities, psychological support and patient visits were highly rated, with 90% of healthcare staff and 81.3% of patients/families recognizing the effectiveness of these activities. In practice, the hospital conducted over 7,839 visits and provided additional support for 763 severely ill children, demonstrating a deep concern for the mental well-being of patients throughout the treatment process. Additionally, the activities of mobilizing and connecting resources also received high agreement, with 87.5% of healthcare staff and 82.5% of patients/families acknowledging the positive role of these activities. Over the year, the hospital mobilized a total of more than 14.2 billion VND, with more than 10.45 billion VND allocated to patients in difficult circumstances and nearly 3.8 billion VND for free heart surgery operations. The number of material support and transportation assistance provided to patients reached hundreds, alleviating financial burdens on patients and enhancing the humanistic aspect of public healthcare services. Public communication and community education activities, although somewhat abstract in patient awareness, still received support from 85% of healthcare staff and 77.5% of patients/families. With 333 communication posts, 4 free healthcare programs, and meaningful activities such as the "Love Lifts Steps" program for children orphaned due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the hospital has gradually turned social work into an effective and in-depth health communication tool.

Table 1. Social work at children's hospital 2 according to healthcare staff and patients, patients' families

Social work at Children's Hospital 2	Group of medical staff and patients, patients' families					
	Health workers		Patients, patients' families		Sum	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Psychological support and patient visits	36	90,0%	65	81,3%	101	84,2%
2. Mobilize and connect resources	35	87,5%	66	82,5%	101	84,2%
3. Communication and Community Education	34	85,0%	62	77,5%	96	80,0%
4. Support the patient's life	33	82,5%	58	72,5%	91	75,8%
Sum	40	100,0%	80	100,0%	120	100,0%
P = 0.001						

Support activities for patients' daily lives – from free meals, meal vouchers for cancer children, travel tickets, to gift programs – although receiving an average agreement level (82.5% in the healthcare staff group and 72.5% in the patient/family group), are among the most directly impactful activities on patients' everyday lives. With over 133,000 free meals provided through the “Love Kitchen” program, 11,938 gifts, and dozens of travel assistance cases, social work at the hospital has become a vital support for thousands of patients on their treatment journey. Overall, the social work model at Children's Hospital 2 is organized in a professional, methodical, and systematic manner, combining psychological, material, communication, and resource mobilization support elements harmoniously. Although there are some discrepancies in the ratings between healthcare staff and patients, both groups acknowledge the positive contributions of social work. This difference can be explained by the varying degrees of direct involvement and experience between the two groups. Healthcare staff may have a deeper understanding of the process and outcomes of activities, while patients and families may only see the direct impact on specific issues. This reaffirms the increasingly important role of social work in the modern healthcare system, especially in pediatric care facilities, where comprehensive care for both physical and mental health is always prioritized. To further enhance effectiveness, the hospital needs to increase communication about the role of social work within the patient community, as well as strengthen resources and specialized training for the social work staff, maximizing the effectiveness and humanistic value of this model in the new development phase.

Discuss the issues raised

Social work at Children's Hospital 2 has demonstrated its significant role in supporting patients and their families to overcome the challenges during the treatment process. However, despite achieving positive results, the model still faces several issues that need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of its operations in the future. To continue promoting and optimizing social work at the hospital, important issues currently present must be discussed and resolved.

First, one prominent issue is the difference in the assessment levels between healthcare staff and patients/families. Survey results show that healthcare staff evaluate the effectiveness of social work activities more positively than patients and their families. While healthcare staff have a comprehensive understanding of the processes and impact of these activities in supporting patients, patients and their families only feel the direct effects when they face specific situations. This difference reflects the gap in the level of exposure and practical experience between the two groups.

Healthcare staff are likely to perceive the broader scope of social work and the support processes within the hospital, while patients and families usually focus on the immediate and direct assistance they receive throughout the treatment process. This creates a gap in the perception of the role and impact of social work. To address this issue, the hospital needs to develop more objective and comprehensive methods for evaluating social work effectiveness from both sides. These evaluation activities should not only focus on specific indicators but also take into account the feelings and perceptions of patients and families, in order to adjust and improve activities to better meet actual needs.

Second, another issue that needs attention is the sustainability of resources for social work. Although Children's Hospital 2 has achieved impressive results in mobilizing and connecting resources, with over 14.2 billion VND in donations raised in the past year, maintaining and ensuring the sustainability of these resources remains a major challenge. Sustaining long-term funding for support activities, especially for patients in difficult circumstances, requires continuous efforts from both the hospital and the sponsoring organizations and individuals. To maintain and expand social work activities, the hospital needs to build a long-term resource mobilization strategy and establish strong links with its sponsors. This will not only ensure that the hospital has enough resources to sustain its support programs but also create a sustainable support system, allowing the hospital to continue developing social work in the future.

Third, an area that needs improvement is the quality and coverage of life support programs for patients. Although activities such as free meals, gift donations, and transportation assistance have been positively assessed, the level of agreement from the patient and family group has not reached the highest level. This suggests there is still a gap in the recognition and actual effectiveness of these support programs. To enhance the effectiveness of life support activities, the hospital needs to closely monitor and assess these programs, while improving the timeliness and accuracy of meeting patients' needs. This will not only help patients and families feel more comfortable during treatment but also improve the quality of healthcare services at the hospital.

Fourth, communication and community education should also be given attention. Although the hospital has implemented many communication and community education programs with positive results, some activities have not truly achieved a high level of understanding and application from patients and families. Health and social work communication programs need to be designed in a way that is easy to understand and more accessible to patients, especially families in difficult circumstances.

To make social work effective, the hospital needs to improve patient access to information and support services, particularly for health communication programs focused on children's care. Communication messages must be clear, easy to receive, and meet the real needs of patients and families, especially when families may face difficulties in accessing medical information.

Finally, improving the capacity of social work staff at the hospital is a crucial factor in enhancing the effectiveness of social work. Social workers need to be professionally trained and have a deep understanding of patients' needs, especially in a pediatric hospital setting. Staff training will enable them to provide timely and effective support services. At the same time, the hospital should create a work environment that encourages creativity and innovation in social work approaches. For social work at the hospital to continue to grow, investment in staff training and development, as well as maintaining a professional and supportive work environment, is essential.

In general, social work at Children's Hospital 2 has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of healthcare for patients, particularly children and families in difficult circumstances. However, to ensure the sustainable and effective development of this social work model in the future, the hospital needs to address issues regarding the difference in assessments between the groups, maintain resource support, improve the quality of life support and community communication programs, and enhance the capacity of social work staff. Implementing these measures will make social work at the hospital a powerful and deeply humane tool in healthcare for the community.

Conclusion

Social work in hospitals is increasingly playing a vital role in supporting patients and their families, while also contributing to enhancing comprehensive care quality in healthcare facilities, particularly at Children's Hospital No. 2. With its focus on pediatric care and supporting families in difficult circumstances, social work not only addresses material needs but also emphasizes emotional support, helping to alleviate stress and anxiety for patients and families throughout the treatment process. However, despite the commendable outcomes achieved by social work at Children's Hospital No. 2, the effectiveness of these activities is still influenced by several objective and subjective factors. Firstly, the social work model in the hospital is not yet fully integrated and lacks professionalism, leading to overlapping responsibilities and inefficiencies. The shortage of dedicated social work staff makes it challenging to implement coordinated and timely patient and family support activities. Additionally, the professional expertise and practical skills of the social work team are not sufficiently advanced to meet the practical demands, resulting in a gap in addressing the psychological and social support needs of patients. One key factor to consider is the level of coordination between different departments in the hospital, especially between healthcare professionals and social workers. While there is some level of collaboration, there is a lack of consistency in implementing support activities, which affects the effectiveness and timeliness of social work interventions. To address this issue, it is necessary to establish standardized procedures and enhance interdepartmental collaboration within the hospital. To

improve the effectiveness of social work at Children's Hospital No. 2, significant investment in resources, including both human and material resources, is required. Developing a team of highly trained social workers with strong practical skills is crucial to ensuring that psychological and social support services are implemented effectively and provide tangible benefits to patients and their families. Additionally, policies that encourage cooperation between departments within the hospital should be promoted to create a collaborative and open working environment, thereby enhancing care and support for patients.

In the context of modern healthcare, standardizing social work processes, developing professional skills for the team, and promoting interdepartmental collaboration are key factors in improving the quality of social work and better meeting the psychological and social support needs of patients. If developed in the right direction, the social work model at Children's Hospital No. 2 will play an essential role in improving healthcare services, protecting patients' health, enhancing their mental well-being, and building trust in the hospital and the healthcare system as a whole. In conclusion, social work in hospitals is not only about providing support to patients but also an indispensable part of a comprehensive healthcare system. To maximize its effectiveness, long-term strategies and fundamental reforms in organizational models, resource allocation, and interdepartmental coordination are needed to better meet the demands and challenges of modern healthcare.

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