



PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM FOR PATIENTS WITH A COMORBID CONDITION

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LOCATION: ROMANIA, EUROPE

Romania is a country located at the intersection of Central and Southeastern Europe. According to Everyculture website, the name of the country, Romania, reflects the influence of ancient Rome on the nation's language and culture. The total population in Romania was last recorded at 21.33 million inhabitants.

The official language is Romanian. The majority of Romanian residents share a common culture. Christianity is the predominant religion.

Romania went through many trials during the decades of the communist regime. The 50 year dictatorship had a profound impact on Romanians causing injustice, poverty, social problems, and degradation, as well as political and economic instability.

THE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Romania confronted major changes after the fall of the communist regime and struggled greatly to overcome barriers in health care system, address specific areas of concern and the "chronic underfunding", while avoiding "the collapse of the system" (Zaman, 2010).

The recent recession in the health care system imposed serious restrictions to the access of what supposed to be "free" public healthcare.



GLOBAL FIELD AGENCY: Hateg Hospital, Hunedoara County, RO

In order to determine an appropriate selection of psychosocial interventions for patients with chronic conditions comorbid with mental illness specific considerations for the etiology of the chronic conditions in Hunedoara County were explored.

The most important communities in this county were developed around enterprises focused on: metallurgic and siderurgic industry, coal and gold mining, uranium extraction, as well as thermal power and hydropower thermal plants.

The long-term exposure (active and inactive) to high amounts of toxic compounds used in the metallurgic and siderurgic industry, the exposure to toxic minerals and radioactive elements also used in the technological process, was associated with comorbid conditions and a shortened life span.

The comorbid medical conditions of underserved categories such as older adults, individuals from rural areas, and children/adolescents from state institution remain a great concern.

No formal role of social workers or other health professionals is assigned in the healthcare system in terms of psychosocial support provision for patients and their families.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Psychosocial interventions, as well as expressive therapies and their benefits were presented to the multidisciplinary team of specialists involved in elaborating the comprehensive pain management program for patients.

During the informative sessions, psychosocial interventions were presented as a vital component of the medical care. Appropriate training was ensured by presentations, analysis of the similar programs, existing concerns, and demonstration.

A three-week pilot experiment was proposed in order to be able to estimate costs, evaluate feasibility, establish the time frame and design, predict outcomes, performance, and sustainability. The standard intervention model was analyzed and adapted in collaboration with the interdisciplinary team.

OUTCOMES

In the course of my special study, I had the opportunity to engage with various health professionals and stakeholders in order to explore options for the implementation of the psychosocial intervention for patients with a comorbid condition in the health care system.

Addressing the comorbid medical condition of patients should be an ongoing effort and preoccupation at local and national level, reuniting the effort of state, nonprofit, and private sector.

The final report of the special study includes: background information, a presentation of the Romanian health care system and its reforms, the available forms of psychosocial support, the necessity of implementation of psychosocial support and educational services for children, adolescents, and adults with a comorbid condition, specific considerations for children coming from state institutions, challenges in the health care system, staff-shortage, specific conditions of Hunedoara County, psychosocial interventions in the health care system, conclusions and recommendations. Implementation of expressive therapies in the health care system (intervention goals, intervention model), program implementation considerations, and support groups were also included.

SKILLS DEVELOPED

The special study enhanced my abilities to effectively integrate advocacy, promote awareness, and select psychosocial interventions that will facilitate recovery and functionality in the health care system.

This global study enriched my experience and allows me to better understand, assess, and evaluate circumstances, medical conditions and concerns patients have, while promoting engagement, trust, empowerment, and competent services in the health care system.

The global social work experience promoted cultural competency that will guide my practice and will help me be efficient when working with a large spectrum of population not only in terms of ethnicity, gender, and race, but also in terms of different worldview, ability, identity, and life experiences.



LESSONS LEARNED

- The implementation of psychosocial interventions should take into consideration county specific risk factors, resilience factors, prevalence, and symptomatology of patients with a comorbid condition.
- Rural or isolated areas require a collaborative effort, a multidisciplinary approach, and an active involvement of stakeholders in order to improve access to health care services.
- Similar healthcare programs should be studied and successful initiatives should be adapted to the potential and needs of the communities.
- Improving the existing prevention and treatment programs by creating an educational component in the healthcare system.
- Since no qualified health care professionals are assigned in providing psychosocial support in Romanian hospitals, in-service training for the existing personnel remains the only options for the Romanian health care system in the actual context.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

- The practice models and methods for effective social work interventions, promotion and prevention aspects in mental health, delivery models of psychosocial treatments and rehabilitation services presented in Social Work Practice in Mental Health (SW 698) provided valuable information used when designing the psychosocial interventions. In addition, Mental Health Policy and Services (SW 636) through information related to public health concepts and policies, delivery systems, and service settings, guided me when establishing the framework for the special study.
- I was able to build my advocacy for implementing the psychosocial interventions based on research and knowledge gained in Mental Health and Mental Disorders of Adults and Elderly (SW 606) course, Interpersonal Practice with Adult Individuals (SW 628), Interpersonal Practice with Groups (SW 624), as well as the information provided by Advanced Topics in Interpersonal Practice courses (790: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Family Psychoeducation, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy).
- Advanced Topics Macro SW Issues in Global Social (SW 799) particularly equipped me with principles of global social work practice along with competencies and strategies for developing psychosocial interventions in the health care system.



CAREER CONNECTIONS

After the completion of my special study I am more aware about the role of increased collaboration between all the actors involved in the healthcare sector and the fact that the infrastructure for a strong healthcare system addresses patients' physical and psychological well-being in a holistic approach.

Significant gaps identified in the coordination of services for patients with a comorbid condition should be addressed immediately.

The special study provided the opportunity to address my passion for social change in a historically oppressed society with a strong interest in clinical social work.

ADVICE

I would highly suggest taking Advanced Topics Macro SW Issues in Global Social (SW 799) course in the semester prior departure.

In addition, I would suggest connecting with other students who already had the opportunity for a special study abroad. Researching information about the country is extremely useful for a successful and safe international study.

Become knowledgeable about country's history, develop an appreciation for people's values, and be sensitive to their unique set of challenges and strengths. It is also useful to have an idea about country's language, predominant religion, people's preoccupations, and notable achievements.

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