



Interventions for Patients with Neonatal Injuries and Associated Neurological Issues

Pediatric neurologists provide an array of services to patients diagnosed with neonatal injuries such as hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy and associated Cerebral Palsy. A variety of other neonatal injuries can also lead to associated neurological issues for babies from birth through adulthood. Neurologists often strive to provide comprehensive care to address both physical and psychological needs, in order to enhance patient outcomes. For this reason, having a social worker present in the neurology clinic that is educated and dedicated is critical.

As a medical social worker of neurology and neurosurgery, I have the opportunity to assist a significant number of families effected by neonatal injuries. I work as the only social worker in a large Neurosciences Center that consists of over 25 neurologists and neurosurgeons. I have the responsibility of assisting patients suffering from cerebral palsy, intracranial hemorrhage, non-accidental brain trauma, stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease, Huntington's Disease, ALS, aneurysms, brain tumors and a variety of genetic diseases. My job consists of assisting patients in dealing with chronic pain on top of emotional issues relating to their disease progression. I also help patients with financial assistance for necessary medications, grants for services they cannot afford, assesses and provides intervention for any biopsychosocial issues.

Pediatric neurologists care for patients from birth through adulthood, which means patients come to our clinic at various stages of their neurological illness. Much of my career consists of working with patients that have endured a neurologic birth injury, to address a variety of social concerns and psychological issues. Many of our patients suffer from impairments such



as developmental delay, motor impairment and cognitive deficits. Patients with cerebral palsy can benefit greatly from social work involvement since the disease is not curable. Social work interventions for cerebral palsy patients always include necessary counseling and assessment of needs. After identifying a patient's unmet needs, I work to create a treatment plan that includes specific objectives to meet those individual patient needs.

Determining which social work interventions are necessary for a patient with Cerebral Palsy is based on the patient's current needs. Patients with Cerebral Palsy will often have a complex variety of needs; therefore, it is important to determine which deficits require immediate attention to adequately prioritize. Early intervention for social issues and cognitive deficits can dramatically improve outcomes for children with Cerebral Palsy. Some of the interventions that our pediatric neurologists implement for Cerebral Palsy patients include medication, surgical intervention, therapy (Physical, Occupational, and Speech), counseling, and recommendations for specific durable medical equipment or alternative therapy. As social worker, part of my job is to ensure that patients are capable of carrying out the medical treatment plan that that our neurologists recommend. I often get involved with pediatric patients that are non-compliant in their treatment plans, either due to financial or time constraints on the parents. Since lack of compliance for pediatric patients' falls on the responsibility of the parents, part of my job is to work with parents on barriers to care. I assist families by providing counseling to address emotional concerns such as stress or time management issues such as inability to keep up with medical appointments or adequately manage their child's care. By working with families to address their biopsychosocial needs, I am able to identify aspects of their lives that are not always addressed in general medicine that may be impacting their care.

I work to provide financial assistance for medications and necessary medical procedures for our patients suffering from Cerebral Palsy. Neurology medications are traditionally expensive for patients to afford, leading to difficulty of patients obtaining necessary medications. Upon opening of ProMedica Neurosciences Center in 2018, I developed a medication assistance program in which I seek out financial assistance to fund medication for a large number of our neurology patients. This program has allowed me to assist a significant number of patients



with Cerebral Palsy in obtaining life-saving medications. I work closely with pharmaceutical companies to utilize patient assistance programs, advocate for patient's medical necessity and identify the need for additional programs. In cases where I cannot find funding, I also assist patients with obtaining grants for medication co-pays, necessary surgical procedures as well as funds for continued care at home. As patients with Cerebral Palsy age, they are sometimes unable to care for themselves. I often assist patients with obtaining Medicaid waivers for group homes or long-term care to ensure that they have access to appropriate and safe housing. Patients with Cerebral Palsy sometimes have mobility issues, I also assist patients with establishing transportation to medical appointments, obtaining durable medical equipment and referring to outside agencies for community needs.

As social worker of ProMedica Neurosciences Center, I have the ability to influence a high volume of patients with Cerebral Palsy and other neurological issues associated with neonatal injury. My goal is to grow the social work program that I have developed for our Neurosciences Center by providing additional services for our patients. I plan to expand my education by earning my Master's Degree in Social Work, which will allow me to gain necessary clinical skills. I was accepted to Campbellsville University's Masters in Social Work program for fall 2019. I plan to continue my education in order to obtain my LISW to practice independently as a social worker. Once I earn my Master's Degree in Social Work, I plan to expand our neurology practice by collaborating physical care with mental health diagnosis. After earning my MSW, I will be capable of providing assessment and diagnosis of behavioral health conditions for our patients. Social work services help bridge the gap between physical medicine and social needs that are often missed in traditional care. I believe that I am making an impact daily in our patient's lives, as I see the positive change in patients who are able to afford medicines they need to survive and obtain services they normally could not. During my education, I plan to learn valuable leadership skills and advanced psychotherapy in order to better serve our patients with Cerebral Palsy. With these skills, I can begin to provide comprehensive services for our patients that will allow opportunities to grow socially, challenge disease progression, and experience a better quality of life.



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