Care Team | Social Worker

Having a social worker on your care team can make a significant difference in managing the symptoms of Parkinson's, improving your quality of your life and maintaining relationships and connections.

Social workers can also help with wellbeing and care planning.

What is a social worker?

Social workers are considered internationally to be core members of the care team for a person with Parkinson's. They are university-qualified professionals dedicated to assisting people to improve their lives, with a focus on their personal and social wellbeing.

Social workers take the time needed to build relationships with people so that together they can consider all aspects of their situation, including their strengths and capacities, as well as the areas where they need help. They partner with people to address personal difficulties and structural barriers. They offer solutions, supports and pathways that make sense in the context of the person's environment, preferences and abilities.

Social workers celebrate diversity; they fight against discrimination and promote every person's right to the highest attainable standard of health care. They have the knowledge and skills to ensure that people living with Parkinson's, their family and carers, receive comprehensive, individualised care and support.

How do social workers work with people living with Parkinson's?

Counselling & emotional support:

- Providing individual, couple and family counselling to help cope with the diagnosis and reduce its impact on their mental health. For many people, this includes dealing with changes in their identity and the complex nature of loss and grief. Social workers can provide counselling to help people cope with the emotional challenges of Parkinson's, and maintain the quality of their relationships.
- Offering strategies to manage stress and anxiety related to living with Parkinson's.
- Validating people's unique responses to their diagnosis (with particular attention to people from culturally, gender or neurologically diverse communities).
- Recognising symptoms early and arranging early intervention for mental health issues.

Supporting carers:

- Supporting family members and carers to understand and respond to all aspects of the condition and its consequences.
- Providing referrals to carer support services and respite services (in-home or residential).
- Ensuring access to benefits and entitlements. For example, the Carer Payment or Carer Allowance.

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- Managing stress, anxiety, and other emotional challenges.
- Promoting the importance of carer self-care.

Care co-ordination & case management

- Facilitating access to appropriate health care through referrals
- Advocating for access to other services to which people are entitled
- Developing personalised care plans that address the individual's specific needs and goals.
- Integrating all professionals and services into a coherent, unified approach tailored specifically to each individual.
- Monitoring outcomes and making adjustments to ensure optimal results of care.

Practical support

- Checking with people that the practical supports they are receiving meet their needs, respect their wishes and help them achieve their goals.
- Supporting people to communicate effectively with carers and service providers.
- Negotiation and advocacy with care providers to ensure that services can continue to meet their changing needs for allied health, personal care or accommodation.

Financial assistance

- Providing information on government payments and benefits and helping with the application process. For example, My Aged Care, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Carer Payment.
- Monitoring changing eligibility requirements and circumstances.

Maintaining social connection

- Connecting people to Parkinson's specific support groups for social interaction and shared experiences.
- Identifying local resources and services that can provide additional support appropriate to people's age, culture, community and situation.

Advocacy

- Advocating for responses to clients' needs within the health, aged care and disability systems, ensuring their voices are heard, and their preferences are respected.
- Ensuring that people receive the level and quality of service and support from either My Aged Care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to which they are entitled.
- Monitoring care and support services to ensure that they are culturally appropriate and trauma informed.
- Escalating appropriately when people's rights are being ignored, including family violence.

Early advance care planning

- Educating people and supporting them through planning for their futures. For example: Advanced Care planning, and Enduring Powers of Attorney.
- Helping people to create advance care plans or directives and articulate their end-of-life preferences and wishes.
- Discussing and arranging the means whereby any special aspects of those arrangements are to be respected (for example returning to Country; recognising Next of Kin).

Infosheet kindly reviewed by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), is the professional body for social workers in Australia. See their website to find an accredited social worker and for more resources and information.

AASW
Australian Association of Social Workers

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