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Letter to the Editor

The Impact of Social Work on the Management of Chronic Respiratory Diseases

El impacto del trabajo social en el manejo de enfermedades respiratorias crónicas

Dear Editor,

Chronic respiratory diseases pose a major public health challenge due to their high prevalence, morbidity, mortality, economic burden and their impact on emotional and psychosocial well-being.[1] Consequently, social and clinical variables should be used to categorize patients with chronic respiratory diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), into groups that correlate with resource utilization and clinical outcomes. This requires a multidisciplinary personalized management that includes social work.[2]

The specific integration of social work into the field of pulmonology remains unformalized, lacking a clearly defined professional profile. However, including social workers in pulmonology departments is crucial for several reasons. Chronic respiratory diseases are among the leading causes of chronic conditions, presenting a significant challenge for healthcare services. Diseases like COPD often lead to frequent exacerbations, significantly impacting patients' quality of life and increasing their need for comprehensive care. The high dependency on technologies such as oxygen therapy and home mechanical ventilation, which consume electricity that some patients may struggle to afford, further underscores the need for social workers. They are particularly important for dependent patients, such as those with neuromuscular diseases or ALS, who are included in home ventilation programs. Social workers assist with practical issues like transportation, housing, and financial assistance and supporting caregivers. Loneliness and lone living are highly prevalent among people with COPD and negatively affect patients' outcomes and responses to interventions. Moreover, COPD patients have a high level of social frailty due to their physical and psychological burden. Given the high percentage of vulnerable patients and the necessity for self-care, the inclusion of social workers in pulmonology services is indispensable for improving overall patient well-being and treatment adherence.[3,4]

The integration of professional social work in managing chronic respiratory diseases presents essential needs and deficiencies that must be addressed. Is essential to recognize the need for specialization in social work to address the unique aspects of respiratory diseases. Specific training programs for social workers in respiratory medicine are needed, covering psychosocial adaptation, family communication, and advance planning. Personalized social intervention plans should be developed, considering the impact of respiratory diseases on patients' quality of life and social participation. The integration of psychosocial factors into clinical diagnosis, considering emotional, social, and familial aspects alongside clinical factors, is desirable. An interdisciplinary approach and networking are needed, creating teams that include social workers, physicians, psychologists, and other health professionals. Lastly, social work requires scientific methods to improve intervention processes, understand psychosocial factors in health-disease processes, and design effective, individualized interventions.[5]

In summary, social work is crucial in the comprehensive management of chronic respiratory diseases. Specialized social workers can significantly enhance the quality of life for patients and their families by providing holistic support that addresses both medical and psychosocial aspects. Empowering social work in pulmonary medicine is essential for improving patient outcomes. Key needs include appropriate resource allocation, policy development to integrate social work into respiratory care, and continuous education for social workers to stay updated on best practices and emerging research.

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Authors' contributions

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Conflicts of interest

Authors declare not to have any conflict of interest related to this manuscript.

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