



**Statement on
Hospice and Palliative Care
Social Work Practice
In Times of Health Care Crisis**

Hospice and Palliative Care Social Workers (HAPC-SW) are health care clinicians who are essential to the care of patients and families throughout the lifecourse. Social workers see patients of all ages dealing with serious conditions. In times of health care disasters, such as the Coronavirus Pandemic, it is necessary for HAPC-SW to be allowed to continue their work which is pivotal to the emotional, social, and existential well being of the patients, and families that they serve, but also the colleagues with which they work and communities in which they live. Social workers are essential problem solvers and mental health clinicians that every health care entity should utilize as an integrated resource.

1. HAPC-SWs are essential health care workers (Reigada et. al., 2020) and as such, should remain employed and working their regularly scheduled hours. They can shift some of their responsibilities to emotional or peer support of colleagues, or offering group or individual therapy as appropriate based on their license and individual state guidelines.
2. Social Workers have a duty to provide appropriate services in public emergencies including pandemics such as the COVID-19 crisis to the greatest extent possible (NASW, 2017). Their employers and supervisors have a corresponding duty to provide for their safety and to address their competing needs so that they can provide these services (childcare, emotional support, meet basic needs of their family, etc.). Strategies including remote working, flexible time, etc. should be explored and implemented as feasible (ANA, 2020).
3. In the case of a medical crisis, palliative and hospice social workers may be asked to work remotely to preserve PPE and other equipment for their agency. Social Workers are expected to adhere to all NASW Ethics and Values (NASW, 2017), including standards specific to hospice and palliative social work (NASW, 2004). All provisions should be made by employers and supervisors to support social workers in maintaining their full caseload, schedule, and pay throughout the crisis, including allocating them any supplies and equipment they may need to maintain contact with the patients and families they serve (Reigada, et. al. 2020; ANA, 2020). Commensurate with expectations of other essential workers, social workers should be prepared to accommodate unexpected and reasonable changes in their work pattern, assignment, and mode of working as the situation requires, and as their personal situation allows.

4. In addition to their own patient load, social workers may also be expected to take on support of their team, other teams within their agency, other medical teams within their region, and other groups as assigned by their supervisor or as they themselves deem appropriate. This is considered appropriate use of a social worker's time, as long as they are able to serve these groups without violating any agency policy, any privacy laws, or any social work ethics or values, and offering these support or therapy groups serves a need during this time of crisis, and is within the scope of the employer's mandate. Groups for anyone not on the social worker's caseload, however, should not interfere with the social worker being able to meet the needs of their caseload.

5. Social workers have a duty to challenge social injustice (NASW, 2017). Any health care crisis will more than likely present an opportunity to speak about the social inequities in the health care system, as it will inevitably impact ethnic, racial, cultural and social minorities and those in lower socioeconomic classes more than those of higher socioeconomic status. As such, social workers have a duty to assure that all patients are treated:
 1. Equitably
 2. With dignity
 3. Consistently
 4. In a just manner

6. HAPC-SW also have a duty to share their work and disseminate findings to fulfill their ethical duties to the field, to their clients, and to broader society (NASW, 2017).

Selected References:

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- National Association of Social Workers. (2017). *NASW Code of Ethics (Guide to the Everyday Professional Conduct of Social Workers)*. Washington, DC: NASW.
- National Association of Social Workers. (2020). *Coronavirus (COVID-19): 8 ethical considerations for social workers*. Retrieved from <https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Ethics-Education-and-Resources/Ethics-8/Coronavirus-8-Ethical-Considerations-for-Social-Workers>
- Reigada, C., Romao, C., Coelho, J., Lourenco, J., Pires, M., Alves, M. & Ramos, P. (2020). *Good Practices for Social Work: COVID-19 (Perspective: Palliative Care Social Workers group)* retrieved from https://www.eapcnet.eu/Portals/0/adam/Content/Z9vTE1T9H0yD57FOFW5KeQ/Text/Good%20Practices%20for%20Social%20Work%20-%20COVID19_EN.pdf