“THE ROLE OF MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKER IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PATIENT SAFETY IN INDONESIA”

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ABSTRACT

Patient safety issue has developed in recent time due to the increasing cases of medical error in performing medical services. Patient safety is a new discipline in medical science, emphasizes at report, analysis, and prevent medical error to prohibit the unwanted effects of medication. Patient safety is the absence of mistake or free from injury due to accidents (Kohn, Corrigan & Donaldson, 2000).

Therefore, as a system, patient safety is expected to provide a safer health care and preventing injuries from errors due to any action or no action that should be done. Currently, the international community has begun to focus on addressing the patient safety, such as the world health organization (WHO) which emphasized the importance of safety in service to the patients (World Alliance for Patient Safety Forward Program of WHO, 2004).

Patient safety issues in Indonesia is relatively new, people was shocked by the discovery of case errors in medical practice, such as the recent case of two twins Juliana, the alleged victim of malpractices in RS. Omni International (rakyatmerdeka.co.id/news/2010/06/23/96821/PDIP-Dorong-Regulasi-Malpraktek-dan-Keselamatan-Pasien).

The Government has attempted to ensure patient safety by releasing the latest health Act No. 36 Year 2009 on Health, yet there are no special regulations regarding patient safety. However, there are regulations made by the Hospital Association of Indonesia (PERSI).

The lack of quality for patient safety should be prevented during the process of services that provided by the hospitals. Non-medical roles also become an important part in the service of the hospital to maintain patient safety, which will complement the medical role. Medical social work is an important profession in the hospital services, the latest Indonesian Health Ministry Regulation also requiring the type-A hospitals to include a social worker in their health services. The roles that can be done by medical social workers in hospital setting are conducting individual and family counseling, scheduling room visitation, conducting home visitation, conducting social evaluation, working together with the social services affairs ministry the social agency, provide the social counseling, assist the rehabilitation team and implementing therapy, preparation to client’s home-coming, and conducting the after care. Based on these roles, patient safety can be achieved by continuously monitoring the patient’s progress.

The role of social workers should become an important part in the hospital’s health services. The role of medical social workers in Indonesia is only in the treatment for patients with financial difficulties. as can be seen in several major hospitals in Bandung, medical social workers only involved in social cases such as HIV-AIDS, drug users and patient administrative affairs. Medical social work service should be in a form of social and emotional assistance affecting patients in overcoming the disease and its treatment.

Key Words: Medical Social Worker, Patient Safety
Preface

Many issues occur in the health care system have made the health care service becoming the highlight on Indonesia’s social development. For Indonesia, the health care service is the main focus need to be improved because health is one of the indicators of Human Development Index, which is very important for a nation. The direct health care provision received by the people is provided by hospitals and thus hospitals should provide an excellent service because patients are hoping that the service could help them with their illness. In the process, the patient safety is not yet considered as an important condition for the patients. This can be seen from the raising numbers of malpractice cases in Indonesia which only causing another burden to the patients and a little effort has been done regarding the cases. In the legal process, the health care service providers (doctors) or the hospitals themselves take no responsibility in the medical error cases and they are untouched by the legal sanction. This issue is very damaging to the patient and continue to be a topic of discussion and study to prevent the suffering of the patients. Instead of be saved in the healing process, patients become unsaved after receiving hospital care.

The development of patient safety issues continues to grow, especially after the frequent occurrence of errors in performing medical practices. Patient safety is a new discipline in medical science that emphasizes reporting, analysis, and prevention of medical error to prevent the unwanted effects of medication. Patient safety is the absence of mistake or free from injury due to errors (Kohn, Corrigan & Donaldson, 2000). Thus, patient safety as a system is expected to provide care to patients more safely, preventing injuries from errors due to any action or no action should be done. Currently in the international community it’s self has begun to focus on the handling of patient safety as the world health organization (WHO) emphasized the importance of safety in service to the patients (World Alliance for Patient Safety Forward Program, WHO, 2004).

According to IOM, Patient Safety is defined as freedom from accidental injury. Accidental injury caused by errors, including failure of a plan or using the wrong plan to achieve goals. Accidental injury is a result of carrying out an action (commission) or not taking action should be taken (omission).
The meaning of hospital patient safety is a natural process providing hospital care to patients more safe (http://www.litbang.depkes.go.id/download/Lokakarya/Loknas Bandung/BLU-Patient-Safety.pdf). Patient safety is comprised of: Risk Assessment, Identification and management of risks to patients, reporting and incident analysis, the ability to learn and act on patient incidents, implement solutions to reduce and minimize risk.

**Policy In Patient Safety**

International Health Organization / World Health Organization (WHO) continues to conduct studies on patient safety. Then arranged a special curriculum to schools of health for patient safety. Earlier in November 1999, the American Hospital Association (AHA) Board of Trustees identified that safety and security of patient (patient safety) is a strategic priority.

While in Indonesia, data on KDT (unwanted events) or medical error is still very minimal, because there are many patients do not understand about the safety of patients or even still there are hospitals or clinics are covering up cases related to patient safety. This causes the lack efforts to improve the quality of patient observation in Indonesia.

In the Indonesian Policies there are no special articles about patient safety, although there have been several attempts by government to maintain health services in general, which in the end will also effecting the maintenance of patient safety, such as the issued of the Health Law No. 36 Year 2009 about Health. although the law is still general but has provide direction for the health services providers to provide the best service to the public. Then Law No. 44 of 2009 on Hospitals which have included the patient safety in article 2 declares that hospital put emphasizes to human values, ethics and professionalism, benefits, fairness, equality and anti-discrimination, equality, protection and safety of patients, and have social functioning. Then in article 13 also requires that every health worker works at the hospital must work in accordance with professional standards, hospital care standards, standard operating procedures that apply, professional ethics, respect the rights of patients and patient safety. Then in article 43 which specifically emphasizes the role of hospitals in patient safety. There are also Kepmen 496/Menkes/SK/IV/2005 numbers on the Guidelines on Hospital Medical Audit, whose main goal is to achieve excellent medical care in hospitals far from medical error and provide safety for patients.
While in Law No. 11 of 2009 on Social Welfare, also shows the importance to maintain the safety of humans in general. The implementation of social welfare aims to improve people's welfare, quality, and survival; restore social functions in order to achieve independence. Then among many social welfare efforts there is social rehabilitation aimed at restoring and developing the ability of a person experiencing social dysfunction to carried out his/her social function properly.

**Table 1.1.**

**Regulations Governing the Patient Safety in Indonesia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Brief Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No 36 year 2009 about Health</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Government is responsible for the provision of environment, order, health facilities for the community to achieve their highest degree of health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chapter IV The Government Responsibility Article 15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rehabilitative health service is an effort to restore the patient social function in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No 44 year 2009 about Hospitals</td>
<td>Article 2</td>
<td>Hospitals put emphasize to the value of patient safety and own a social function</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Article 13 Every health worker respecting the patient’s rights and put forward the patient safety</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Article 43 The obligation of the hospital is to apply the patient safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No. 11 year 2009 about Social Welfare</td>
<td>Article 3</td>
<td>The provision of social welfare is to improve the social functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Article 5 Few criteria of problems in the provision of social welfare are social rehabilitation and social protection</td>
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</table>
Then the other concrete effort that specifically regulates the safety of patients has been done by professional organizations / associations of the Hospital Association of Indonesia (PERSI), which has formed the Hospital Patient Safety Committee (CTF-RS), then this committee has developed the Seven Step Guide Towards Patient Safety for hospital staff to implement the Patient Safety in Hospital. Then KARS (Commission on Accreditation of Hospital) of The Department of Health of Indonesia has established the Hospital Patient Safety Standards which will be one of the Hospital Accreditation Standards. This prompted the hospital to better focus on the existence of patient safety, as long as the patient is still receiving medical care service.

However, for patients, the regulations regarding patient safety is not a priority. It is the recovery from their illness is the main destination for patients, and therefore the expected services are health services that can provide healing for the patient. This means the rules that have been prepared by the government ought to be socialized operationally such as regulations in a hospital or clinic that had been developed by CTF-RS

**Medical Social Worker Role in Patient Safety**

The services provided by social workers either directly or indirectly is tailored to meet individual needs, because the effort or the service is directed to assist individuals, groups or communities in carrying out their functions. However, there are also other professionals engaged in the efforts to provide assistance to overcome problems caused by the interaction between people with each other. Then along with the development of social problems in the society, social workers also have to interact with various other professions in accordance with professional setting.

Arthur E. Fink (1974) in Adi (1994:370-40), provides a description on the fields of social work, which include service-related fields in health care. The practice of social work in the medical field trying to address patients suffering from acute illnesses, or to address issues in referral.

The social worker plays an important role in interpreting the individual who is sick and in helping them to improve and use their personal skills and their social resources to achieve health, both physically and mentally. By using a team approach, a social worker working with physicians, nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other health professions, in the context of patient care, as proposed by Achlis (1990:53), namely: "Social workers in professional relationships related to service medical social responsibility for social healing
patients in hospitals or as a partner with the medical profession to reach an efficient process of healing.

It is therefore, a medical social worker and other medical professionals should collaborate in providing the best services for patients, especially in collaboration with a physician by providing the physicians with the patient social conditions and to analyze the patient's behavior and condition in his/her environment. In addition, medical social worker helped the doctor by organizing resources to be used in the hospital, family environment, and society in the healing process, for medical treatment process can be carried out effectively.
According to Lindau et.al (2003) in Gehlert and Browne (2006:24) that interactive biopsychosocial model expands Engel’s model to include general health status rather than illness alone and consideration of the important role of social networks and cultural contexts in health. Then it is can be explained that the biopsychosocial model plays an important role because it covers the health status comprehensively and not seeing the illness as a separate.

This approach has extend the modeling approach in medical social work, which previously only focusing on the biological matters only, yet in this model, another factors also taken into account and believe that biological matter is not the only issue of the existence of a disease. There is also non biological matters can provide influence in the process of the health care service. For example, in biopsychosocial model, the health care service has taken into account the ability of the patient to purchase a recommended medication when making a plan of treatment for the patient, while as for the medical approach, only focusing on the laboratory result on the physical status of the patient.

Then with this approach, the health care service also included other discipline to assist the better health service and to improve the patient safety quality. This is along the way with what has been mentioned by Beder (2010) that social work’s biopsychosocial approach provides a carefully balanced perspective, which takes into account the entire person in his or her environment and helps social worker in screening and assessing the needs of an individual from a multidimensional point of view (p. 4).

According to Beder (2010) the medical social work profession is also aiming at the patient social environment because by looking the social environment can help in the healing process as also supported by Gehlert and Browne (2006:24) that Patients’ social support networks can influence their health status significantly. In increasing the role of patient’s social environment, the social worker deliver the service process differently with the service provided by physicians or nurses.

During the time, the role as mentioned above has not reach the optimum level, because many hospitals in Indonesia have no understanding about the need of a social worker in the hospital. The government has oblige all type A hospitals to employ social work, however, although there is a social worker, yet his/her role is still limited to administrative role such as dealing with patient with financial difficulties or specifically handling patients with social problems such as HIV/AIDS or drug abuse. This make the role of medical social work in Indonesia has not been optimum in supporting the health
service to patient based on the safety of the patient. However, there are also hospitals that is employing a medical social worker and has provide the service process accordingly to the medical social work roles steps. The example is at Kidney Hospital of Mrs. RA. Habiebie Bandung. The medical social work has been given the role as:

- Conducting social consultation
- Addressing social problems
- Visiting the family of deceased patient
- Accepting the complains from patients who asking for reduced fees for dialysis
- Cooperating with the head of financial department and human resource regarding the patients who asking for reduced fees for dialysis
- Conducting home visit as the basic of asking for reduced fees for dialysis
- Conducting evaluation for the Drop Out patient, who are not dialysis anymore for 8 times
- Conducting evaluation for patients who decided not to follow dialysis in the hospital and move to another hospital

From the set roles, the prominent role of medical social work is the role to address the administrative issue mainly financial especially for the patients who ask for reduced fees. However, the medical social worker at Kidney Hospitals has played an important role because he/she can overcome the psychology and social issues of the patients such as low self esteem or obstacle in doing the activity, economical difficulty caused by the health care expenses or discrimination issue experienced by the patient in the neighbourhood or in the family.

Another example is West Java Mental Health Hospital, where in the healing process, every patient is being handled by a team consist of various helping professions (psychiatry, psychologist, medical social worker and nurse) which is led by a mental health physician who responsible for the patient in the time of healing process treatment in that hospital. The treatment process for mental health patients in this hospital consist of three steps, they are preliminary steps (intake, assessment and social diagnosis, determination of changing direction, selecting plan of action and contracting), middle step (social treatment) dan final step (evaluating, terminating and after care).

In the hospital service process, the medical social worker role in Mental Health hospital receive an important portion, because the patient is the center of recreational
service given by the medical social worker, meanwhile for the medical profession (physicians and nurses) only working on the medical issue which is conducted regularly and for short time only, such as in provision of medicine or routine check to see the health development of a patient.

From those hospitals, the roles can be given to the medical social worker in hospital setting is to conduct counseling for individual and family on the existing social problems, it is hoped that this counseling could support the healing process of the patient.

Roles can be done by social workers in hospital settings are as a guide and motivator, which social workers conduct activities covering the awareness raising, motivation giving, enabling and providing opportunities and to mobilize the sources to support the helping process. The activity is consist of individual counseling, family intervention, group meeting and other approaches. In conducting the intervention process, the patient participation is very important to develop the ability of the client to be functioned socially.

In conducting the social worker intervention, the social worker has to be active in providing services such as do room visit to collect information on the patient development. Conducting home visit, do social evaluation, cooperating with social ministry, working together with social home care, conducting social guidance, helping the rehabilitation team and conducting therapy, preparing the patient going back home and provide after care.

Mary Johnston (1988:46) brought up many roles for medical social worker in the hospital, they are:

1. Individual and group supervisor. In casework, a social worker help a patient to deal with the problem because he/she can not accept the limitation experienced due to the illness. This can be done by visiting the patient in the room to provide counseling, motivation and spirit to the patient in order to make the patient understand better about his/her condition. Through this counseling, a social worker receiving information that can be used by physician in providing treatment for the medical problem of the patient. In group work, social worker can fulfill the roles in helping the patient family to make a discharge planning according to the patient condition. Furthermore, this family work is to increase the family role in helping the patient to regain his/her health.

2. Drivers. Client is helped to talk about the issue she/he has. Social worker can also help the client to find alternative choices of dealing the issues. In hospital setting, the
client is not only the patient, but it can also be the patient’s family. It is because family too, experiencing problems need to be addressed in connection with patient safety, such as the treatment expenses or the family acceptance toward the patient condition which will be different and the family has to be ready to accept the new condition when the client come back home.

3. Connector. The social worker increase other staff understanding about when they could assist the patient, for example, the patient is crying a lot, never purchase medication, or never been visited by anyone else from outside the hospital. The information received by the social worker can be useful to other helping professionals in dealing with the patient. Even the medical error can be alleviated by the information gathered by social worker. Social worker can also serve a role as connecting resources for the patient especially financial resources.

4. Consultant. Social worker provides information to another institution outside the hospitals. Social worker provides advices to the hospital staff about the patient problems out of the medical problems.

5. Educator. Social worker supervise a future social worker, gives lecture in nursing courses. This is done in order to provide the social worker skills to the other health care professionals to support the better medical service process and keeping the patient safety.

The roles and function of a social worker in a service process could increase the patient safety quality, because the information gathered by the social worker could support the physician in providing the medical treatment for the patient. However, during this time, the service process given by the social worker have not yet focused on the functioned of the profession, which make the role is only play a limit advantage for the patient safety.

The roles as mentioned above have not been understood comprehensively, there are many misperception about the role of medical social work, which causing the hospital service felt uncomprehensively by the patient. The hospital tend to focus only to the medical services.

Meanwhile, considering the patient safety is freedom from accidental injury, then the error because of the failure of a plan or using a wrong plan in achieving the goals has to be avoided by looking more deeply toward various aspect before the patient is being treated. Accidental injury can also happen from commission or omission. This is mainly
because of the lack of information about the non medical condition of the patient, for example, the family condition. When this is not taken into consideration, then it can endanger the patient safety.

**Summary**

Basically, medical social worker is the application of science, skills, attitude and values of social work in health service. The main attention of the social work is the medical issue that is connecting with social aspect and the surrounding environment that can cause disturbance in social functioning and assist the patient to reach the optimum level of social welfare or can be focused on social factors that can help with the patient healing process or social problems that trigger people to be sick or something that prevent someone to use the medication provided to him/her. Then medical social worker become a part in a health care service system and part of the medical team in partnership with another professionals involved in health care.

Social worker become the important part in the services provided by hospitals. the service is manifest in partnership, it means that social worker and other professionals involve in a hospital should support one another and have the same goal toward the patient safety. It is time for hospital to provide a space for medical social workers.

For the government, it is better to also put the role of medical social work in the regulation of health service delivery to the people. Many medical social worker play roles in social organization concerning on health instead work directly in the hospital. This is also because when a social worker enter the health delivery service in hospita, especially public hospital, then the role of social worker is very limited, due to many believes that social worker role is only taking care of patient with financial difficulties as also mentioned previously.

There is a need to have technical efforts in improving the role of medical social worker such as, the hospital has a written guidance about the role of social worker in the hospital setting, or medical social worker is included into the hospital services comprehensively by arranging a multidisciplinary team that will support the increases of patient safety.
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