

## Book Review

Sumser, B., Leimena, M., & Altilio, T. (Eds.). (2019). *Palliative care: A guide for health social workers*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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Social workers in health care settings are particularly positioned to support the life quality of persons facing serious illness through interventions that include their families and communities. *Palliative Care: A Guide for Health Social Workers* is a book that can assist in this process. Drawing from the eight domains of quality palliative care established by the National Coalition for Hospice and Palliative Care (2018), and based on a systematic review of the evidence, the authors assert that palliative care can be a natural extension of health social work. These domains include the process of care, physical, psychological, social, spiritual, cultural, end of life, and ethics. Book chapters are based on each domain where the authors apply the ecological-systems theory to demonstrate assessment and intervention across micro-meso-macro levels.

The book begins by describing the need for palliative care principles and practices in health social work. The emergence of palliative care and relationship of health social workers to palliative care teams is addressed in Chapter 1. The authors focus on opportunities to promote quality of life across systems and through transitions when a patient has a serious illness. Chapter 2 addresses the process of care, the first domain of quality palliative care. The meaning of whole-person care is explained with directions for assessment, psycho education, and documentation that is empowerment-based. Chapters 3 through 7 focus on the physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and cultural domains of quality palliative care. The authors demonstrate how to apply a palliative care approach with directions for intervention across systemic levels.

The next two chapters address the remaining domains, the end of life and ethics. Chapter 8 reviews what is involved in the delivery of hospice care, including preparations for death. This includes addressing a patient's care preferences as they inform a "good death" and how the end of life is shaped by disease trajectory and prognosis. Specific suggestions with examples are provided to help health social workers support a patient's strengths. Chapter 9 addresses legal and ethical aspects of care. The authors provide model questions to help health social workers assess patient capacity. They also provide resources and suggestions for other interventions. This includes a review of Western biomedical ethical principles, advanced planning documents, and landmark cases and policies that shape decision-making and autonomy in health care.

The last chapter focuses on special issues in working with children and older adults. Developmental changes are discussed with additional suggestions for interventions that are person-centered and collaborative in approach. Communication is presented as an important way to process complex emotions and to offset social isolation and distress. Following the last chapter, there is a synopsis of client cases cited in the book, including clinical focus and corresponding page numbers to go back for more information. General resources including technical reports and issue briefs, training opportunities, domestic resources and organizations, international resources and organizations, hospice eligibility and benefits information, multimedia, and additional readings are listed for reference.

*Palliative Care: A Guide for Health Social Workers* is a practitioner-friendly resource that is clearly written and well organized for immediate application. It helps demystify palliative care and delineate common ground for application by social workers across health care settings. Although not the focus of this book, it presents palliative care principles in an accessible manner that could extend to other social work settings. For example, the authors describe the concept of intersectionality and how this necessitates cultural humility as well as efforts to create a culturally sensitive, therapeutic space for intervention. This approach is modeled throughout the book with the use of inclusive language and range of examples of client cases that give voice to historically marginalized populations.

A review of health social work positions and responsibilities would have helped the reader connect with how this work departs from palliative social work. This recognition is necessary given the potential for boundary crossing and need to convey respect for colleagues when collaborating on patient care. If available, research on the consequences of missed opportunities for collaboration would have supported the ethical mandate for this work. Chapters 3 through 7 address the biopsychosocialspiritual and cultural domains. The rationale for this approach is justified, however, these domains are closely related. For example, the social domain and cultural domain are both defined by social interactions. This resulted in some repetition across chapters, so the authors could have made the narrative more succinct or added depth to the analysis by addressing this overlap. A final chapter on how to evaluate success would have been helpful as well given the need for practitioner-friendly models for evidence-based practice.

Nevertheless, *Palliative Care: A Guide for Health Social Workers* is a succinct resource for social workers to better understand and support the delivery of palliative care. Each chapter includes tables that summarize mass amounts of information, prompts that help the reader pause and reflect on content, case scenarios that demonstrate social

work application, and learning exercises that reinforce key points. The case scenarios can help social work students explore how ecological-systems theory informs practice. This book also demonstrates a number of other important concepts, such as intersectionality, as well as social work values, respect for diversity, and attention to the needs of historically marginalized populations. The knowledge palliative social workers bring to the table and applicability of this knowledge across settings and populations is a valuable resource for current and future social workers.

## Reference

National Coalition for Hospice and Palliative Care (2018). Clinical practice guidelines for quality palliative care (4th ed.) [PDF file]. Retrieved from [https://www.nationalcoalitionhpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NCHPC-NCPGuidelines\\_4thED\\_web\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.nationalcoalitionhpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NCHPC-NCPGuidelines_4thED_web_FINAL.pdf)