



Dim Sophearin

Manager of Medical Social Work Unit, Angkor Hospital for Children, Cambodia



Sophearin envisions a future in which more doctors and nurses recognize the critical need for social workers to facilitate community support to improve patient wellbeing.



After working for seven years as a homecare nursing team leader for children with chronic illnesses like HIV, cerebral palsy and other disabilities, Sophearin recognized a strong need for additional support services for patients and their families. Upon discharge, patients and their families not only had to learn how to cope with the diagnosis and provide support for the individual living with the illness, but many were also faced with additional psychological and financial issues that impeded full recovery and wellbeing. Sophearin has spent the last 16 years working in the medical social work unit at the Angkor Hospital for Children, in the capital city of Cambodia.

Why social work?

In 2010, after a social worker from the Netherlands visited the Angkor Hospital for Children where Sophearin works, she proposed to set up the social work program in the hospital and advocated for wrap-around services to better meet patient needs after they were discharged through strengthening community support. Social work aligned well to Sophearin's passion for improving the health outcomes and overall wellbeing of his patients. Having worked with people living with HIV since 2005, Sophearin had become very attached to the patients in his care and social work was a logical career progression to promote the strengthening of psychological, financial and social aspects of one's environment that impact a person's physical health. He was recruited to manage the growing team of social workers in 2012. He is currently pursuing his Master's in Social Work.

Types of support or services and their impact

Since the inception of the medical social work department, the hospital has seen considerable improvements in the outcomes of children with chronic illnesses by shifting the focus from attending exclusively to a child's medical to promoting their psychosocial wellbeing. This shift has enabled Sophearin and the social work teams to work with doctors to keep children in the hospital for the duration of their treatment by more effectively meeting the needs of the

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family, whether that may be additional education surrounding the child's diagnosis or addressing external factors pulling the family to request discharge before the child is ready. Sophearin estimates that 80% of the families receiving this type of intervention agree to remain in the hospital and successfully complete treatment before returning home.

The social work team was also able to partner with a local nonprofit organization to provide temporary foster care to children abandoned at the hospital. This enables the social work staff to provide a safe place for children while the family is located. Social workers are then able to conduct needs assessments, connect the family to community services and provide support for up to three years after reunification. These are just two examples of cases in which social work care is effective at improving the lives of children and their families.

Aspects of the job he enjoys most

As the Manager for the Medical Social Work Unit, Sophearin currently supervises the hospital's three teams of social workers: community outreach, counseling and play therapy. He is also responsible for cultivating partnerships with supporting organizations, fundraising and compiling reports in addition to managing his own caseload. Naturally drawn to direct practice, Sophearin is motivated by the tangible impact of counseling in alleviating anxiety surrounding diagnoses and empowering patients and their families to thrive despite the illness. He points to patience and compassion as essential skills in effective social work practice in addition to being able to create space for patients to feel seen and heard.

Looking forward

Sophearin envisions a future in which more doctors and nurses recognize the critical need for social workers to facilitate community support to improve patient wellbeing. After finishing his Master's in Social Work, he aims to play an active role in promoting and advocating for the expansion of medical social work in Cambodia, using Angkor's model.



**“Improving the workforce.
Improving lives.”**

Who is the social service workforce?

The social service workforce is defined as being comprised of the variety of workers - government and non-government, paid and unpaid - who contribute to the care, support, promotion of rights and empowerment of vulnerable populations served by the social service system.

What is Social Service Workforce Week?

During this week, advocates will bring attention to and build support for the social service workforce as well as raise awareness about promising workforce strengthening efforts supported by stakeholders around the world. Organized around daily themes, the week is an opportunity for Alliance members and the public to engage in discussions and exchange ideas. Daily blogs, worker profiles and resources provide tools and innovative approaches for strengthening the workforce.

What is the Global Social Service Workforce Alliance?

The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance works toward a world where a well-planned, well-trained and well-supported social service workforce effectively delivers promising practices that improve the lives of vulnerable populations. Launched in June 2013, the mission of the Alliance is to promote the knowledge and evidence, resources and tools and political will and action needed to address key social service workforce challenges, especially within low- to middle-income countries.

The Alliance is funded by PEPFAR/USAID and the GHR Foundation. The Tides Center acts as host and fiscal sponsor of the Alliance.

Learn More

Learn more about Sophearin and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #SSWeek, on our Facebook page and on the discussion boards on our website at www.socialserviceworkforce.org.