

Social Work & Electronic Health Records:

A New Frontier for Health Workforce Research

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Social workers are increasingly deployed in integrated primary care settings to address patients' social determinants of health. We sought to show how **Electronic Health Records (EHR) data can be used as a workforce research tool** to assess the **scope, contributions and value** of social work in these settings.



INTRO

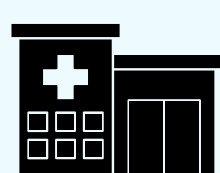
We conducted expert interviews and focus groups with:



30

practicing social workers

from



20

primary care clinics

METHODS



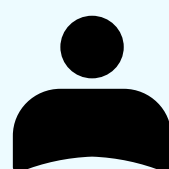
Using EHR data, we analyzed:



647

notes

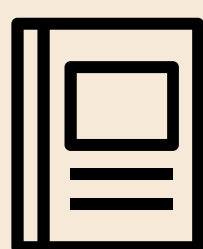
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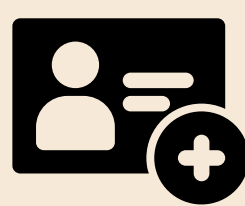
60

patients

Social workers played broad roles in integrated primary care settings, both in direct patient care and management as part of a **dynamic health care team**. However,



Because social workers do not bill for their services, they do not create their own clinical encounters. Instead, they add documentation to existing provider notes.

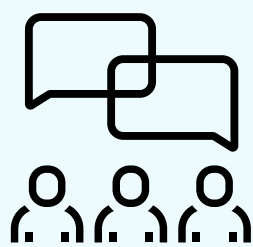


Social workers were not consistently referred to as social workers but as case managers, care manager or other titles.

These were **substantial obstacles to using EHR documentation** to clarify the role of social workers.



RESULTS

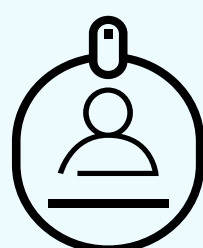
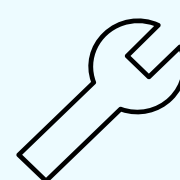


Making EHR easier to use will improve it both as a communication tool, and as a data source for workforce analysis.

SO WHAT?

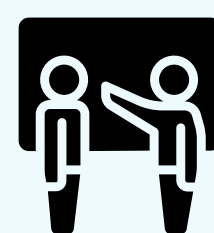


Allowing clinical encounters to be created by providers regardless of billing permissions could make EHR research more feasible.



Social workers consistently referring to themselves in documentation as their profession (i.e. social worker) could also help improve the quality and ease of obtaining data

Social workers should be trained to document in clear and consistent ways that help alleviate common barriers to EHR research.



Read the full brief at go.unc.edu/EHRSocialWork