

Interning at the VA as a Social Worker

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Coming into the field of social work, I told myself I only wanted to work with two populations, children and veterans. I strongly feel that I can give children a voice whether they have special needs, are in foster care, or are in the juvenile correction system. As a military veteran, I feel a strong sense of duty to take care of my country, which includes taking care of my comrades. Prior to my experience with the Brockton Community Living Center (CLC), I did not have experience or any known interest to work with the geriatric and hospice populations. Thanks to my internship in CLC, I now have a fondness for working within these groups. The geriatric population needs advocates, such as myself, to protect and support their wishes and interests. I was initially skeptical about working with the palliative and hospice populations because working around those who are dying frightened me. My experience at the CLC has taught me how to manage and process my feelings associated with death and dying in a healthy way. My supervisor, Noah M. Whiddon, LICSW, is responsible for making my initial experience a deep and educational one. What I respect the most that Noah told me is: "although working in hospice is hard and emotional, you ARE making a difference in a person's life as they reach the end of THEIR journey. How you treat and listen to them can make their transition a peaceful one." When I think about why I decided to become a social worker, I remind myself that I am committed to making a difference in people's lives. Anywhere this journey takes me, my attitude and knowledge will help those in need.

Interning at the CLC has proven to be one of the greatest and most impactful experiences so far in my career. My intern experience has also allowed me to work with the veterans in the subacute rehabilitation wing. This was my first time working with an interdisciplinary and interprofessional team. I witnessed how the team worked together to ensure that the veterans received the best possible care during their stay at the CLC and also a collaborative discharge plan. All of the team members work with the clients and their families, focusing on creating a productive and successful outcome for the client. I learned that building a rapport with clients and their families is critical in their care, and most importantly, each individual is different from the other, and there is no such thing as a "standard approach."

In Palliative Care sometimes the clients have taken care of their affairs and are ready to end their earthly journeys but their families have not accepted the situation. In these scenarios, the care team often gets together and tries to talk to the family to offer support and guidance. Some family members are open and express their feelings, while others prefer not to. In either case, the care team at the CLC will try to refer them to counseling for when their loved one has moved on whenever they are ready. It shows that not only do they care for the veterans but, even after the veterans pass, the CLC staff continue their duties by extending care to their families as much as they can and as much the families will allow.

From the perspective of an emerging social worker, my internship at the VA exposed me to a broad array of opportunities and this experience has been especially fulfilling.