

Terry Parson

My experience as a Social Work Intern at the VA

As a Simmons University School of Social Work MSW graduate student, I was honored with the privilege of being selected to work as a social work clinical intern at the VA Boston Healthcare System. This second-year field placement with its astutely unique organizational structure, has proven a robust and rich clinical learning experience. As a social work intern, I was afforded the opportunity to work across three inter-professional clinics, including Oncology, Primary Care and the Huntington House. I provided clinical services, including psycho-social needs assessments, advanced directives, transplant assessments, care coordination, treatment facilitation, clinical follow-up, and resource service connection. All of these clinics base their care to Veterans on the model of a person-centered, whole-health approach, consistent with the mission of the VA (*"To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan, by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's Veterans".*)

My training rotation was originally at the House, doing clinical and macro-level social work. However, when a need for social work support in the Oncology Department was identified, my trainee coordinators proposed that I collaborate with this team as a unique learning experience. Being an eager social work intern, I wanted to jump at this opportunity! Yet, I had some reservations. You see, at the time, I was experiencing my own very personal journey with cancer, as I found myself being the caretaker for my mom, who was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. I was conflicted. As a new intern, I wanted to put my best foot forward, hone my clinical skills and meet the challenges of this exciting opportunity, but I questioned whether I would be good enough. Could I use my emotional intelligence to effectively serve Veterans who were experiencing their own journey with this diagnosis? My concerns were put to ease after discussion with my supervisors, Gwendolyn Vincent and Sara Hudson. Their interest in my own well-being and earnest investment in my professional learning and success was invaluable- a gesture I will not soon forget! With this type of support, I intrinsically knew that I could meet this incredible opportunity. Their spirit and energy set the tone for my markedly exceptional experience as a social work intern at the VA.

The Oncology clinic team was simply amazing! Everyone, from Dr. Gilbert ("Dr. G") to the nurses, physicians, receptionists, and personnel were incredibly kind, welcoming, and accessible! The Veterans whom I was privileged to support were inspiring- this is not hyperbole. I marveled at their resilience and often found personal strength through their journeys. I only hope that I was able to help them, as they so profoundly helped me. The VA will always hold a special place in my heart and I'm eternally grateful for this transformative learning experience.