

EXERCISE 21 *Gladys: Working With a Client Over Time*

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Purpose

1. To practice skills in assessment in life-threatening situations.
2. To practice goal setting with an ongoing, voluntary client.
3. To practice a preliminary family interview.

Background

Social workers frequently have long-term, ongoing relationships with clients. These may occur in institutional settings such as nursing homes or residential facilities or when the social worker is providing case management or supportive services. Even when the focus of the working relationship is on sustaining the client or maintaining his or her functioning, crises and life events may alter the focus of work.

This exercise presents three vignettes from an ongoing case that require the social worker to reassess the client's condition, intervene with members of the client's network, and reestablish goals for work.

Instructions

Review materials in your text(s) on assessment in life-threatening situations. What are the key things to look for and questions to ask when determining whether a person is suicidal or self-destructive?

Next, your instructor will divide you into roles for each scenario. Anyone not assigned a role should be part of one of the "teams" helping to prepare the role players with their roles. Teams can help fellow students envision their role, develop questions, coach on behaviors to exhibit or look for, and so on. Read and prepare for only *one* scenario at a time.

Debrief after each scenario, with the role players going first. Questions for debriefing are included at the end of the exercise.

Scenario 1

The worker is a case manager serving low-income clients living in an elders-only high-rise apartment building. He or she and the public health nurse alternate visits with Gladys on 2-week intervals to make sure her medical and social service needs are met. Gladys is homebound, due mainly to her excessive weight, high blood pressure, and a diabetes-related leg amputation. She is 89, was widowed 20 years ago, and has a grandson who lives in the suburbs nearby with his family, although she rarely sees him.

The worker is shocked on arriving for this appointment to find her small, cluttered apartment to be unusually dirty and Gladys herself unkempt. She greets the worker from her recliner, but is uncharacteristically despondent and uncommunicative.

1. For the people playing Gladys or the family members, how did you experience the interview? What questions, statements, or actions helped you to feel heard? Which did not?
2. For the people playing the social worker, what did you feel were the strengths and weaknesses of the interview? What parts did you struggle with? How would you do things differently in the future?
3. For observers/team members, what strengths and weaknesses did you observe? Were difficult issues, such as depression, the suicide, and family conflict, adequately dealt with? Were there family members or parties in the role play that you particularly identified with? How might such identification affect your work in similar cases? Overall, what suggestions do you have for strengthening the interview in the future?

Scenario 2

Following the interview in Scenario 1, Gladys attempted suicide by taking a variety of prescription and over-the-counter medications, but was found by a fellow resident and taken to the hospital. The worker is now meeting with Gladys's 45-year-old grandson, Don, and his family to discuss her impending discharge from the hospital. Don has asked for assistance because he would like Gladys to stay with his family, rather than return to the Braden Arms high rise. Don's wife, Glennis, is vehemently opposed to the idea, feeling the responsibility for "entertaining" and caring for Gladys will fall to her, that Gladys has never liked her, and that the couple's children will lose out because of the diminished attention from their parents and the need to convert one of their rooms into space for Gladys. The children, Alisha, age 16, and Sondra, age 11, will attend the meeting. The social worker does not know how the siblings get along or their views on the matter.

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Scenario 3

Plans to move in with Don and his family did not materialize. The Braden Arms reluctantly agrees to take Gladys back, but is concerned about her deteriorating health and potential for future suicidal behavior. In a follow-up meeting with Gladys, the social worker must develop new treatment goals—continuing former goals and/or adjusting them for changed circumstances.

In the session with Gladys, the social worker should review his or her assessment of the situation and develop a mutual contract for work. Recognize that Gladys and the social worker may not agree on what areas constitute a problem for work.

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