

Interviewing a Social Work Candidate Questions and Suggested Responses

Selecting the best candidate for any position is important - time spent prior to hire may save time wasted on an improper hire. Asking the right questions to identify candidates' knowledge and skill sets is key. The questions in this document target specific areas in which a qualified social worker must demonstrate expertise. The bulleted points provide parameters for suitable answers.

An often overlooked part of the interview process is assessment of writing skills. The social work task force recommends that in addition to the verbal interview each candidate be asked to demonstrate observation and documentation skills.

Place the candidate in a common area where several residents can be observed. Instruct the candidate to observe the residents and then write a sample medical record entry describing the resident and situation. Or, an alternate suggestion is to ask the person to write a sample record entry based on a real situation he/she handled from another setting (make certain privacy is upheld). Evaluate the written responses for clarity of thoughts, knowledge of pertinent issues, completeness, legal defensibility and grammar/legibility.

QUESTION	APPROPRIATE ANSWERS
<i>You have 5 computer assessments due, 3 new admissions, 2 discharges and care plans today. How do you prioritize your day?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize day into related activities to increase efficiency • Do all related tasks at once, i.e. gather all charts to complete MDS assessments at one time • Determine what time the residents will be discharging and ensure all services are arranged to facilitate a safe d/c plan (all this should have already been arranged prior to the day of d/c but now it's just making sure it all falls into place) • Since care plans are at scheduled times, all other activities must take place around those • Save the new admissions for the end of the day unless intervention is needed sooner • Remain focused on the task at hand • Minimize interruptions
<p><i>What is your understanding of a grievance policy?</i></p> <p><i>How do you know when to write a grievance report?</i></p> <p><i>How do you describe risk management?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grievance reports are written whenever an issue/complaint cannot be immediately resolved (and sometimes then as well) • Important to understand the facility policy and follow it exactly • Usually, the social worker is responsible for maintaining the grievance log and reporting issues/trends at the quality meeting • Risk management is anything related to reducing the possibility of loss or injury; it requires excellent communication and teamwork as well as ongoing training, especially in areas of customer service • Look for evidence that the candidate has critical thinking skills
<i>Describe the components of a care plan for a resident with depression.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Problem Statement needs to be resident specific and describe HOW depression impacts his/her quality of life • The goal should: 1) offer positive value to the resident, 2) improve his/her life somehow, 3) be measurable and realistic & 4) address causal factors and not symptoms such as tearfulness or combativeness • The approaches or interventions describe <i>what the staff will do</i> to assist the resident in achieving the goal, i.e. provide 1:1 visits

	<p>weekly by the social worker to discuss feelings r/t cause of depression and resident strengths, facilitate a date night with husband, refer to a psychiatrist, etc.</p>
<p><i>What are the components of a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on resident strengths throughout the entire interview and assessment process • Identifying information (ethnicity, spirituality, appearance, payer source, etc.) • Reason for admission and presenting problems, prior living arrangements and level of assistance needed with ADLs and IADLs • Advance directives and need for advance care planning • History of physical and/or psychosocial problems • Mental health and psychological treatment • Personal and family history • Support system • Education and employment history • Interests/hobbies • History of substance abuse • Cognitive functioning • Discharge plan, if appropriate • Impression and assessment
<p><i>How do you prepare to interview a new resident/patient?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Comprehensive chart review</i> to identify: (not going in “cold”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advance directives ▪ Responsible parties ▪ Diagnoses and impact on mood/behavior ▪ Discharge planning issues or placement issues if for long term care ▪ Issues from the hospital such as mood or behavior challenges ▪ Review of nursing assessments, especially fall, pain and elopement risks – ensure care plans are started ▪ Identify areas that the social worker can contribute to an interdisciplinary approach to care plans ▪ Therapy evaluations to get information on the prior level of functioning and goals
<p><i>How do you explain code status to a resident and/or family member?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First ask if they have questions regarding advance directives or code status • Ask them to explain their understanding of the choice, either full code or do not resuscitate (DNR) • Ensure accuracy of understanding • If education is needed, explain full code in the same way that any other treatment or procedure is explained which includes discussion of risks (broken ribs, punctured lungs, probably decreased quality of life). Inform that Full Code includes many procedures, i.e. intubation, cardiac compression, artificial ventilation, etc., • Take the orange card to the meeting as a visual aid • If education is needed for DNR, explain that comfort care is

	<p>always provided, i.e. oxygen, pain management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If code status is changed, must communicate with the charge nurse to get appropriate orders and follow facility procedures
<p><i>Describe your experience with care plan conferences.</i></p> <p><i>Do you facilitate the meetings?</i></p> <p><i>How do you keep them on track?</i></p> <p><i>What information do you report on?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the actual care plan during the conference • Invite participation from resident/family/responsible party • Facilitate an efficient and productive conference • Facilitate conference calls if family/responsible party unable to attend, schedule conferences at bedside if resident is unable to get out of bed • Keep group focused – if conference turns into a “complaint session” schedule a separate meeting with necessary staff • Social worker reports on: mood, behaviors, room changes, roommate changes, how resident is adapting to facility life or if admitted for a rehab stay, the discharge plan, advance directives, emergency contact and relationship
<p><i>What is your experience in discharge planning?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals to community resources – must demonstrate knowledge of most common resources, i.e. home health, medical equipment, Title 19, Meals-on-Wheels, mental health services • Discharge planning starts with the pre-admission process • Comprehensive documentation of all activities related to discharge planning, including name and time of any phone calls, meetings or interactions • Communication with interdisciplinary team, resident and family • Coordination of home health and equipment to coincide on day of discharge or earlier if training is necessary on a new piece of equipment, i.e. 4-wheeled walker, glucometer, etc.
<p><i>How do you give report to a health plan case manager?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared with updates from all disciplines (nursing, rehab, dietary) <p>Focus on progress to justify skilled stay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep conversation short and focused on patient issues • Keep case manager updated on all discharge planning barriers/challenges • If not sure how to answer a question, get someone to help
<p><i>A patient admitted for rehabilitation has declined therapy for two days. What is the role of the social worker?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess reason(s) why resident is declining therapy, i.e. depression, confusion, pain • Identify possible interventions to facilitate participation • Explain insurance benefits and skilled stay requirements • Involve family if appropriate • Consider writing a care plan for “refusal of care” • Communicate with staff at PPS or stand-up meeting
<p><i>Two roommates are not getting along. What do you do?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee must demonstrate knowledge of resident rights and roommate regulations • Talk to both residents, individually and possibly together • Help them generate creative solutions • If a solution is not possible and a room change is necessary, the resident that initiated the “complaint” is the one who must make the

	<p>room change</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document in both residents’ medical records all interventions attempted as well as the outcomes • Make sure families are kept informed as appropriate
<p><i>What is the role of the social worker with pain management?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be familiar with the Federal regulations for pain management in F309 Quality of Life • Assessment using tools like the “faces” scale, the “number scale 1-10” or scales for advanced dementia • Assessment by asking about: aggravating and alleviating factors, impact of pain, meaning of pain, and most importantly, the resident’s goals for pain management • Education regarding: misconceptions related to pain, challenges to achieve adequate pain management, the relation of pain to behaviors/mood, definitions of tolerance, addiction and dependence • Identification of non-drug interventions and techniques to relieve anxiety (guided imagery, visualization, muscle relaxation)
<p><i>A resident’s daughter comes into your office in tears. Her mother is quite ill and probably won’t make it through the week. What do you do?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite her to sit down • Shut the door to ensure privacy, • Put phone on Do Not Disturb • Start where the daughter is – if she needs to cry, let her cry; if she needs to talk, let her talk (about topics she feels necessary) • Encourage her to share her feelings, concern, worries • Do not offer false hope or meaningless comments like “I’m sure things will be just fine” or “At least she won’t be suffering.” • If she is receptive, talk about ways staff focuses on her mom’s comfort • Determine if any action is necessary • Ask if there is anything else she would like staff to do • In some circumstances, suicide assessment might be necessary
<p><i>A resident is admitted to your facility with advanced cancer. How do you approach her on this topic?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start with very general discussion and ask her what she knows about her medical condition or why she is in the facility • Determine if she needs more information or to have information repeated and then facilitate getting the information to her • Involve other members of the IDT as necessary, i.e. physician, nurse • Use active listening techniques • Initiate or update the care plan with social work interventions such as 1:1 visits to allow resident to share feelings r/t diagnosis and prognosis
<p><i>Tell me about your communication skills.</i></p> <p><i>How do you employ them in the interdisciplinary team?</i></p> <p><i>What personality traits do you have that help you communicate effectively?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication is vital to a successful facility • Must be comfortable speaking up in a group, being assertive even if the group does not agree with the content, i.e. room change conflicts, patient discharge decisions • Ability to listen to other peoples’ points-of-view and use reflective statements, i.e. “What I hear you saying is…” or “It’s important to you that…” • Ability to remain professional, mediate disagreements

<p><i>What is one of the most challenging situations you have dealt with?</i></p> <p><i>How did it resolve?</i></p> <p><i>What did you learn from it?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee must be able to describe a complicated situation and demonstrate skill and critical thinking in achieving resolution • Listen for terms like: residents rights, assessment, documentation, involvement of the IDT, family meetings, physicians orders, advance directives, ombudsman and care plans • The candidate should demonstrate ability to incorporate learned knowledge into daily practice and possibly modify current practices based on such experience • Important traits include flexibility, self-confidence (not ego)
<p><i>What are your strengths?</i></p> <p><i>Weaknesses?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviewee should be able to express how strengths and weaknesses impact his/her performance in the work setting • How does the interviewee adjust or compensate for weaknesses?
<p><i>What is something you have failed at?</i></p> <p><i>What did you learn?</i></p> <p><i>Are you using this knowledge now?</i></p> <p><i>How?</i></p>	<p>Must demonstrate ability to learn from mistakes and to use the knowledge positively</p> <p>Assess ability to identify when it is time to ask for help, to utilize other resources</p>
<p><i>What areas would you like more education?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability and willingness to be honest about areas that need work or that the person wants to become more proficient • Of concern would be the interviewee who does not feel additional education is necessary
<p><i>What do you do to prevent burnout?</i></p>	<p>Hobbies/interests</p> <p>Family, friends, social supports</p> <p>Leave work at work</p> <p>Know limits</p> <p>Maintain a sense-of-humor</p> <p>Talk to supervisor if feeling stressed or overwhelmed</p> <p>Exercise and eat a balanced diet</p> <p>Get enough sleep</p>
<p><i>What would you do if you were feeling overwhelmed?</i></p>	<p>Speak to supervisor</p> <p>Communicate regarding unfinished tasks</p> <p>Develop action plan to address unfinished areas</p> <p>Ask for help!</p>
<p><i>What makes you competent to do this job?</i></p>	<p>Someone who exudes confidence but not arrogance</p> <p>Someone comfortable jumping into new environments but also willing to ask for help</p> <p>Skills – be specific</p> <p>Training – be specific</p> <p>Experience – be specific</p> <p>Personality, personal goals, passion – describe</p>
<p><i>Why do you want to work here?</i></p>	<p>Assess for sincerity</p> <p>Did interviewee do research on the facility prior to the interview, i.e. number of beds, clientele, rating on nursing home compare?</p>