

STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA CLASS SPECIFICATION

Class Title: Mental Health Assistant

Class Code: 70333
Pay Grade: GF

A. Purpose:

Monitors and provides direct patient care by maintaining an atmosphere conducive to treatment, listening to and helping psychiatric and chemically dependent patients deal with their problems and assisting with unit management duties to meet the physical and emotional needs of psychiatric patients.

B. Distinguishing Feature:

Mental Health Assistants is distinguished from the Mental Health Aide by being responsible for providing assistance in unit management which include overseeing completion of patient-care assignments, monitoring Mental Health Aides' compliance with policies and procedures, in addition to performing basic nursing care skills and providing care to adolescents, chemically dependent patients, acute patients, chronic patients, and geriatric/psychiatric patients, completing patient care assignments, providing an atmosphere conducive to treatment, documenting and reporting observations of patient behavior, reporting vital signs not within normal limits, and deciding when to initiate emergency codes and measures. Mental Health Assistants distribute work to and monitor work of Mental Health Aides. Higher level medical personnel dispense medication, determine necessity for further medical or psychiatric treatment and supervise subordinate personnel by interviewing and hiring personnel and conducting performance appraisals.

C. Functions:

(These are examples only; any one position may not include all of the listed examples nor do the listed examples include all functions which may be found in positions of this class.)

1. Provides unit management by overseeing and assisting aides in completion of patient care and unit duty assignments to provide appropriate, competent, and consistent patient care.
2. Monitors and assesses compliance of Mental Health Aide staff with policies and procedures and reports infractions to nurses to promote an orderly, safe work environment conducive to treatment.
3. Performs basic nursing, listening, and intervention skills to meet physical and emotional needs of psychiatric patients.
 - a. Provides personal care of patients including bathing, shaving, nail care, shampoos, dressing, toileting, and other related hygiene needs.
 - b. Takes and records patient's temperature, blood pressure, respiration and pulse rates, and obtains urine samples.
 - c. Observes, records, and reports changes in patient's condition or behavior.
 - d. Escorts patients to recreation activities, workshops, classes, lab, meals, library, field trips, medical appointments, bank, and downtown.
 - e. Maintains close observation of suicidal or run-away patients.
 - f. Assists with restraint or seclusion of patients to prevent injury to patient or others.
 - g. Intervenes in escalating patient behavior and assists in resolving patient conflicts.
 - h. Distributes meal trays and snacks and provides necessary assistance to patients in eating.
 - i. Teaches patients proper cleanliness, grooming, housekeeping skills and basic cooking skills.

4. Communicates patient or unit-related data to provide the supervisor with information necessary for treatment or program planning.
5. Performs therapeutic interaction with patients by motivating patients to participate in unit activities, positive role modeling, conducting one-on-one supportive sessions with patients to assist the patient in dealing with their problems and to resolve conflicts among patients.
6. Performs other work as assigned.

D. Reporting Relationships:

This position provides work direction to Mental Health Aides.

E. Challenges and Problems:

Challenges include responsibility for work direction of direct patient care provided by Mental Health Aides in an effort to maintain an appropriate level of care, to ensure that appropriate procedures are used, policies are followed, and open communication is maintained for consistency in patient care on each shift. Other challenges include managing units alone at night; orientation and training of newly hired Mental Health Aides to the unit and patients; dealing with patients' widely diversified, unpredictable, explosive, verbal and physical abusive behaviors; restraining and secluding patients without injuring themselves or others; lifting patients who are heavy and unable to assist with moving or repositioning themselves; and providing personal care for and feed resistive patients.

Typical problems include learning the special needs of each patient on their unit, their behavior problems and how to manage each patient individually; trying to motivate patients with low self-esteem, lack of social skills, confusion, inability to deal with and accept reality, manipulative behavior, chemical dependency; and dealing with a range of patients from adolescents to geriatric patients.

F. Decision-making Authority:

Decisions include distribution of patient care and unit duty assignments to Mental Health Aides; assessment of Mental Health Aides' compliance to unit policies and procedures, reporting infractions to nurse; positioning of patients in beds and wheel chairs; when a patient needs personal hygiene; when intervention or assistance is needed because a patient is losing control; in what order to perform such direct-care activities such as bathing, feeding, and dressing; whether vital signs are within normal limits; what to do to help a patient relax who cannot sleep; when to initiate emergency codes and measures; determine what patient behaviors should be charted and/or reported; determine whether or not a patient needs assistance or guidance with personal care or other activities; whether to intervene with patient's behavior; and determining how to approach a patient.

Decisions referred include determining treatment for patients who are ill or injured; dealing with unusual or difficult behavioral problems; medication or treatment decisions; whether or not to restrain or seclude a patient; whether or not to continue seclusion; when to admit, transfer, or discharge a patient; communications with patients' relatives, social workers, and legal counsel; and determining whether employee actions are a problem and how to deal with them.

G. Contact with Others:

Daily contact with patients to provide direct care; nurses, physicians, therapists, and teachers to receive instructions on patient-care techniques and assignments and to provide observations on patient behavior. Occasional contact with friends and relatives of the patient when they are visiting.

H. Working Conditions:

The incumbent works with psychiatric and chemical dependency patients who may be unpredictable, unmanageable, and verbally and physically abusive both toward other patients and employees (biting, scratching, hitting, kicking, hair pulling, pinching, spitting, and swearing). Physical assaults by patients are not unusual. Incumbents must be able to lift heavy patients, many of whom are unable to assist with being moved or repositioned and must be moved from chairs to beds.

I. Knowledge, Skills and Abilities:

Knowledge of:

- unit routine and the physical and psychological needs of the mentally ill;
- patient safety procedures;
- standard treatment programs for the mentally ill;
- procedures for documenting patient behavior and progress;
- patient's rights;
- effective methods of assigning and monitoring subordinates' work and providing training.

Ability to:

- provide work direction;
- follow instructions and procedures;
- carry out individual program plans for treatment of patients;
- accurately observe, recognize, report, and record physical symptoms and significant behavioral characteristics of patients;
- verbalize the needs of patients;
- be empathetic and supportive with patients;
- assist in lifting and moving patients;
- deal with aggressive behavior;
- lift and move patients;
- communicate information clearly and concisely.