

Principle/Introduction

The hospital based social worker must be aware of the complex psycho-social and legal issues inherent in the adoptive process. These issues are ever more complex in the wide variety of adoptions now available and adoptions of infants whose health is compromised and who may require prolonged hospitalization.

While it is true adoption is much more than a legal process the perinatal social worker must have knowledge of relevant state laws pertaining to adoption in addition to the requirements of hospital policy. If a conflict exists between these laws and policies and good social practice, then the social worker shall advocate for change so that the needs of infants and families (both birth and adoptive) might better be served.

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Standards for Adoptions in a Hospital Setting

*Every baby, every family...
supported with competent
and compassionate care*

Standards for Adoptions in a Hospital Setting

Standard 1

In hospital settings, social work services shall be provided to individuals involved with the relinquishment of an infant for adoption. Birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptee are appropriately regarded as clients whose needs and rights shall be respected and considered. The services available to birth and adoptive parents shall include assessment, advocacy, support, ongoing counseling, and/or referral to an appropriate agency for continued intervention.

Standard 2

Hospitals shall maintain a written plan for the provision of specialized social work services pertaining to adoptions. This plan shall be developed by a master's prepared social worker and it shall clearly define the responsibilities and functions of the social worker's role. The social worker to provide service shall have a Master's degree in Social Work and shall have the opportunity to participate in training related to relevant state and/or interstate adoption laws and procedures.

Standard 3

If a woman presents to the hospital and intends to relinquish her child for adoption but has not yet made arrangements through a State-licensed adoption agency or an attorney, the perinatal social worker shall complete an initial assessment, and, following hospital guidelines, shall provide the birth mother with referrals to State-licensed adoption agencies from which she may choose.

Standard 4

In cases of agency adoption the hospital social worker and the adoption agency social worker shall coordinate services and ensure the required documentation is complete and in the appropriate record(s).

Standard 5

In cases of independent adoption of a hospitalized infant the perinatal social worker shall:

- Have contact with all parties involved, including birth parent(s), adoptive parents, and attorneys. The social worker shall assess birth mother's feelings regarding relinquishment, review her rights and options, discuss her desire to involve adoptive parents, and review her preferences regarding her interaction with the infant during hospitalization or ascertain that these issues have been discussed with her by a qualified person.
- Document in the medical record all information relevant to hospital staff's interaction with birth and adoptive parents.
- Upon learning the adoptive family wishes to be involved during the infant's hospitalization and that the birth mother agree; meet with the adoptive parents to review hospital policies regarding their involvement during delivery and in the nursery, provide information regarding birth mother's rights during hospitalization and during the adoption process, ascertain the level of involvement they desire, review issues of confidentiality, and provide supportive contact during hospitalization.

Standard 6

In agency or independent adoption the perinatal social worker shall initiate and facilitate communication between birth parents and medical staff and when requested by birth parent(s), between adoptive parents and medical staff. The communication should include ongoing medical information regarding the infant's status and discharge teaching for adoptive parents.

Standard 7

The perinatal social worker shall not be involved in identification or referral of an infant to any specific adoptive family, or the procurement of an infant for adoption for a specific adoptive family.

Standard 8

The perinatal social worker will provide support and teaching to staff regarding psycho-social and legal aspects of adoption.

Standard 9

The perinatal social worker, functioning as an integral part of the health care delivery team, shall be included in every aspect of hospital policy formulation and decision-making when related to the issue of adoption.