

ENHANCING MULTIDISCIPLINARY CARE: INTEGRATING SOCIAL WORK INTO A HIGH-RISK FOOT SERVICE (HRFS)

Devereaux De Silva ¹, Cindy Rahardjo ¹, Anna Wellington-Boyd ¹, Naomi Rowlings ² Eleanor Thong ³

¹ Department of Social Work, The Alfred, Prahran, Australia

²Dept of Podiatry, The Alfred, Prahran, Australia; ³Dept of Diabetes and Endocrinology, The Alfred, Prahran, Australia

Aim:

To implement and evaluate a dedicated Social work position in the High-Risk Foot Service (HRFS) at Alfred Health, with a focus upon undertaking psychosocial and risk related assessments and interventions contributing to patient-centered healthcare for patients, their families and especially, their carers.

“ Social work often sits between the biomedical model and the patient’s social world. We are dealing with more than just high-risk foot presentations, we’re managing complex social issues like housing, safety, and family support” .

Social worker –HRFS, The Alfred

Background and Rationale:

The HRFS at Alfred Health was established in 2021 to provide timely and high-quality interventions for patients with complex foot wounds. A multidisciplinary approach was employed, incorporating podiatry, orthotics, vascular surgery, diabetes education, and endocrinology services.

Research suggests stress and societal pressures, and a lack of support affects the severity of ulcers .¹

Clinicians in the HRFS at The Alfred also identified an unmet need to address the psychosocial burden associated with this patient cohort, many of whom face significant psychosocial barriers including homelessness, mental illness, substance use, and social isolation.

Social work plays a vital role in improving health outcomes through holistic, person-centered care which involves family and carers. This was the impetus for the implementation of 0.63EFT of a Social Work role to this clinic in 2023.

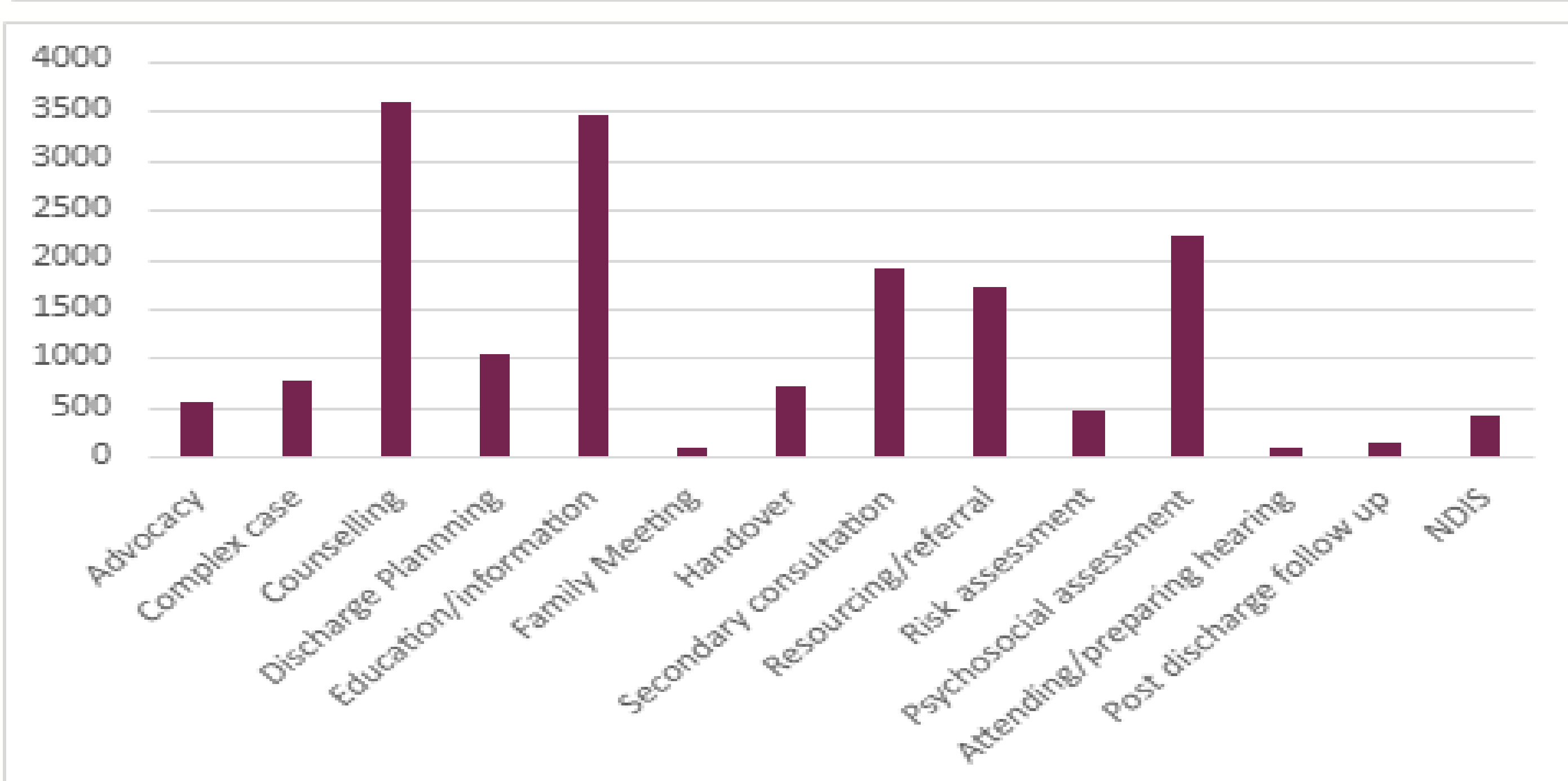
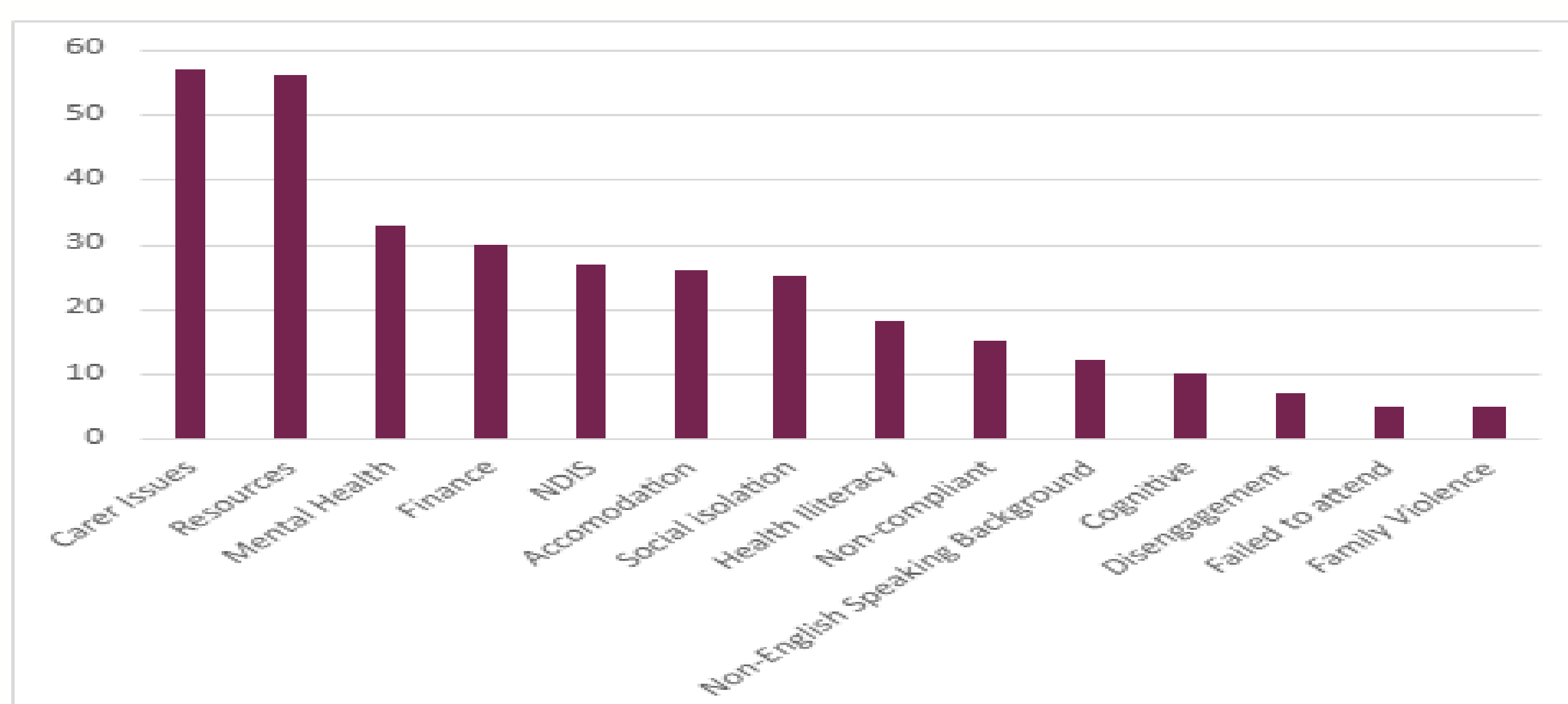


Method

Data was collected and analyzed from the Electronic Medical Record (EMR) from October 2023 – September 2024 in relation to;

- Number of patients seen by social work across the period.
- Identification of key themes for social work referral.
- Social Work intervention types and time attributed.

Summary of Results



101 patients seen by social work during the 12-month data collection period.

Common themes related to reason for referral to social work included carer stress, lack of resources, financial concerns, social isolation, and Mental Health concerns

Data indicated counselling support as the highest intervention provided by social work in terms of time spent, followed by providing education/information and assisting with complex discharge planning.

Support around navigating the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was also a key theme.

Interventions also undertaken by social work involved provision of advocacy, risk assessments and safety planning related to family violence which requires significant social work time.

Conclusions

Data indicated a high demand for social work intervention in the HRFS and a consistent rise in psychosocial issues identified over a 12-month period.

- The need for Social Work support for carers is significant.
- The role for social work in HRFS bridges the gap between clinical care and the complex realities patients, families and carers face.
- Social workers are essential in addressing the social determinants of health that impact foot disease outcomes.

Further study:

- Data collection is ongoing to support a proposed increase of social work service to the clinic.
- Feedback is being undertaken to include the patient voice and measure satisfaction with social work interventions by service users.

References:

1. Setyawati, Andina et al. (2024) Managing Diabetic Foot Ulcer: Psychological Impact on a 53-Year-Old Woman, The Journal for Nurse Practitioners, Volume 20, Issue 7, 10508.