



## Enhancing Hospice Counseling Services

Hospice medical social workers (SWs) have long been responsible for all aspects of patient psychosocial assessments, plans of care and services. To augment hospice psychosocial services, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has updated the [Medicare Benefit Policy Manual](#) to include marriage and family therapist (MFT) and mental health counselor (MHC) services. Expanding the counseling services offered to hospice patients and their loved ones requires them to fully understand how the MFT, MHC and SW are integrated into the interdisciplinary group (IDG).

Hospices are not required to employ MFTs and MHCs, but those that do should understand the associated requirements. Special attention should be paid to the education, [experience and licensure or certification requirements](#) for MFTs and MHCs. The scope of practice for MFTs and MHCs includes counseling services, a [core service](#) according to CMS. As such, MFTs and MHCs must be directly employed by the hospice. As W-2 employees, MFTs and MHCs may be full-time, part-time or PRN as deemed necessary by the hospice.

Hospice medical social workers continue to be core members of the IDG and are required to participate in the development and updating of the comprehensive assessment and attend IDG meetings. The addition of an MFT and/or CHC does not change that. Instead, the MFT and/or CHC fills the IDG role of counselor, providing a clinical perspective in the development and updating of the comprehensive assessment. The MFT and MHC are encouraged to attend the IDG meeting. However, a detailed communication plan should be in place to keep the MFT and MHC up to date on IDG meetings they do not attend.

Discipline	W-2 Employee	Core Service	IDG Core Member	Comprehensive Assessment/ Plan of Care	IDG Attendee
Medical Social Worker	Yes	Counselor Case Manager	Yes	Create and update	Required
Marriage Family Therapist	Yes	Counselor	No	Add clinical perspective	Suggested
Mental Health Counselor	Yes	Counselor	No	Add clinical perspective	Suggested

## About The Author

Zaundra Ellis is the Vice President of Hospice Professional Services for Axxess. She leverages her many years of expertise in the hospice industry to create a software solution that is easy to use and allows clients to be clinically, administratively and financially compliant. Prior to joining Axxess, Zaundra served as the Executive Director for Kindred Hospice and Heart to Heart hospice agencies across Texas. In this role, she oversaw a hospice house, created and implemented a companywide QAPI program for an organization that served more than 2,500 patients, and used her experience to create operations that improved compliance and maximized reimbursements.



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