

*Pioneering a profession:  
A history of social work innovation at  
the MGH, 1905 - 2005*



MASSACHUSETTS  
GENERAL HOSPITAL

# Pioneering a profession: A history of social work innovation at the MGH, 1905 - 2005



**1905**

## **DECISION:**

*Initiate Social Services*

Richard Cabot, MD, decides to bring social services to his clinic patients. Purpose: "to make medical care effective" by addressing basic needs of poor patients.



**1905**

## **FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

Garnet Pelton, a nurse, is hired by Dr. Cabot, using his own money, to see patients in the Clinics. Due to her illness (tuberculosis), she leaves six months later.



**1905**

## **OFFICE SPACE:**

*"The Corner"*

"A few small tables, chairs, a bench and two white screens to give some privacy were the furnishings."



**1906**

## **PRACTICE:**

*Main Divisions of Work*

1. "Tuberculosis"
2. "Hygiene teaching"
3. "Infant feeding and the care of delicate children"
4. "Vacation, outings and convalescent homes"
5. "The care of unmarried girls, pregnant, morally exposed or feeble minded"
6. "Help for patients needing work or a change of work"
7. "Provision and provisions for patients dumped at the hospital"
8. "Assistance to patients needing treatment after discharge"

**1906**

## **EPIDEMIC:**

*Tuberculosis*

Tuberculosis is "everywhere." Volunteers are recruited to supervise educational classes and to refer patients to agencies,



*The West End, circa 1906*

**1821 1846**

MGH admits its first patient



**1869**

The Ladies Visiting Committee, strong supporter of Social Work

**1892**

The Vincent Club, strong supporter of Social Work

**1898**

Dr. Richard Cabot named Physician to Outpatients

**1904**

National Average Wage in the U.S. is 22 cents an hour



**1904**

The Boston School of Social Work opens, Simmons College

1907

**DECISION:**

*Cabot Hires Cannon*

Ida Cannon, RN, completes 8-month course at Boston School for Social Work, during which time she volunteers with G. Pelton and Dr. Cabot in the Clinics. Cabot hires Cannon. Shortly, she is named Head Worker with five staff and 30 volunteers.



1907

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*"Sex Problems of Girls"*

Mrs. Jessie Hodder is hired to work with unmarried pregnant girls. Her premise: "We must meet them where they are." In 1911, she leaves to become the Superintendent of the Massachusetts Reformatory for Women in Framingham.

1908

**OFFICE SPACE:**

*"The New Corner"*

Sign above desk reads:  
"DO NOT LOSE YOUR BLUE CARD"



1907

**ADVOCACY:**

*Patient Hunger*

At request of social workers, hospital opens clinic lunch counter to ease patients' hunger during long waits to see physician. Milk, crackers and cheese cost 5 cents.

1907

**PRACTICE:**

*"Methods of Psychiatric Work"*

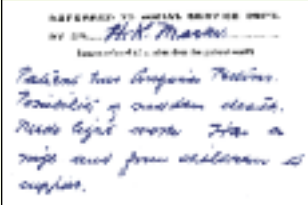
- "Establish a friendly relation with patient"
- "Encouragement"
- "Suggestion and persuasion"
- "Home visits and letters"
- "Re-education and explanation" and activities like the Clay Modeling Class and "country vacations"



1908

**PRACTICE:**

*Referrals to Social Service*

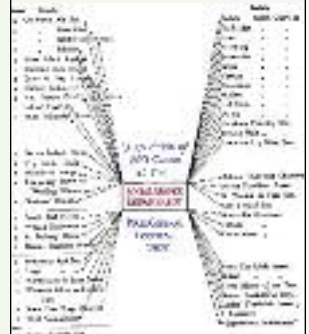


1907

**PRACTICE:**

*Referring Patients*

The process is known as "steering, shoving and following-up."



1910

**PRACTICE:**

*Medical and Social Diagnosis*

Physicians increasingly use Medical Diagnosis as their practice incorporates more scientific thinking. Cannon proposes the use of Social Diagnosis to link social work

1909

**ORGANIZATION:**

*Supervisory Committee*

Supervisory Committee formed to oversee and finance the work of this new "non-medical" department. Committee members are: Drs. Richard Cabot, Daniel Jones, Robert Osgood, James Putnam; Ladies Visiting Committee: Mrs. Nathaniel Thayer; Boston School for Social Work Director: Jeffrey Bracket; MGH Superintendent, Dr. Frederick Washburn.

1908

Henry Ford introduces the Model T Ford



1909

MGH neurologist, Dr. James Putnam, brings Freud to Clark University, Worcester



1912

Dr. Cabot writes *Social Service and the Art of Healing*

1912

Children's Bureau established



1913

Ida Cannon writes *Social Work in Hospitals*

1916

World War I begins





**1910**  
**ANNUAL REPORT:**  
 Patients seen = 1709  
 General work: 50%  
 Tuberculosis: 35%  
 Nervous Disorders: 9%  
 Unmarried Girls: 6%


**1911**  
**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**  
*Children's Clinic*  
 Diseases of the children referred:  
 "tuberculosis; rickets; gonorrhea;  
 feeding problems; chorea;  
 heart disease; whooping cough."

**1911**  
**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**  
*Handicapped*  
 Kings Chapel, in Boston, pays for social worker to provide services to the handicapped. She works at both the Clinics and at Kings Chapel.

**1913**  
**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**  
*Research*  
 Social worker joins Dr. Edsal studying "lead poisoning cases." Resultant criteria used in new Occupational Disease Clinic.

**1912**  
**EDUCATION:**  
*Boston (Simmons) School of Social Work*  
 Cannon and Cabot advise on curriculum and teach medical social work. Students do field education at MGH during their second year.

**1914**  
**CHIEF OF SERVICE:**  
 Ida Cannon appointed Chief of Social Service. Assumes responsibility for social worker on inpatient services. Hospital pays for in-patient social worker; Supervisory Committee pays for out-patient social workers. Ruth Emerson, first trained social worker, appointed Head Worker in the wards.







**1912**  
**PRACTICE:**  
*What Works?*  
 As social work is practiced, the staff and leadership are simultaneously developing methods and theory.



**1913 - 1918**  
**FIRST SOCIAL WORKERS:**  
*Specialty Clinics*  
 Social workers are assigned to Syphilis Clinic, Genito-Urinary Clinic, Diabetic Clinic, Orthopedic Clinic, Infantile Paralysis Clinic and Neurology Clinic.

- 1913**  
**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**  
*Occupational Disease*
1. Screens all outpatient charts daily watching for occupations such as painter, rubber worker, tinsmith, or stone cutter.
  2. Educates these patients re: dangerous processes and what precautions to take.
  3. Submits information to physicians.
  4. Studies what needs to be reinforced by legislation.
  5. Follows-up on all 147 cases of lead poisoning seen.

1917	1918	1920	1927	1929	1934
Mary Richmond writes <i>Social Diagnosis</i> conferring with Ida Cannon	Ida Cannon is instrumental in organizing the American Association of Hospital Social Workers	19th Amendment passed, women get the right to vote 	Group work first used as treatment modality 	The Great Depression 	Federal Crippled Children's Program organized 

### Ida Cannon's Motto

Ida keeps this drawing on her desk. It exemplifies her approach to developing a new service in a conservative, tradition-bound institution.



### 1917 DISASTER:

Nova Scotia

Explosion of ammunition ships in Halifax Harbor causes 1,600 deaths and numerous injuries. Ruth Emerson and Edith Baker go to Halifax to:

1. Aid victims with clothing and shelter
2. Arrange after care and follow-up appointments for injured
3. Establish special care for injured children
4. Conduct a census of those handicapped
5. Provide intensive case-work for those with social problems

Miss Emerson stays on helping to establish medical social service permanently in Halifax.

### 1915

#### 10th ANNIVERSARY:

Major challenge: meeting the individual needs of so many patients. "Should we be focusing on mass work (populations) or individual work?" Over 200 social workers from across the country gather to talk about progress, mutual difficulties and look into the future.

Staff includes:

- 13 social workers
- 4 stenographers
- 19 student social workers
- 8 student nurses
- 64 volunteers

Budget:  
\$11,626.07

#### PROGRAM

Monday Afternoon, 2:30 o'clock

Dr. Deloit presiding.

"Outline of Present Forms of Organization of Social Service Department," by Ida M. Cannon.

"Some Fundamental Principles of Organization, Their Possible Application to Hospitals," by Kenneth G. Valentine, Industrial Councilor.

Discussion.

1. How does Social Service better you in your development of hospital work?
2. Does Social Service help you? If so, how?
3. Should your work eventually absorb that of Social Service? If not, why not?

### 1918

#### PRACTICE:

*Feeding Clinic for Infants*

"Purposes: to make sick babies well; to teach mothers how to keep them well; to reduce the death rate among babies; to teach mothers motherhood.

Methods: improved milk supply; supervision of well babies; encouragement of breast feeding; milk fund for needy families; instructions in proper feeding; home visits by nurse; cooperation with public health authorities and social agencies on matters affecting infant welfare."

### 1918 EDUCATION:

*Summer Institute*

Students come for practical work from Smith College, Boston School of Social Work and the Red Cross Institute.



### 1919

#### ORGANIZATION:

*Officially Accepted*

By vote of the Trustees, Social Service becomes both administratively and financially an integral department of MGH. Supervisory Committee becomes the Advisory Committee.

Ida Cannon: "... for 14 years we were free to try experiments and make mistakes." We are now "officially accepted."

1935

Maternal and Child Health Services established



1938

Minimum Wage established, 25 cents per hour



1938

March of Dimes established to fight polio

1939

World War II begins



1940

Penicillin available to non-military patients

1941

MGH establishes its 1st Emergency Plan



1942

Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire

**1929**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Tumor Clinic*

Social workers supported by a 2-year DPH grant. At surgeons'

**1930**

**25th ANNIVERSARY:**

Two hundred fifty gather and Dr. Cabot speaks on "The Future of Hospital Social Work." Donors give over \$20,000 in honor of Dr. Cabot establishing an educational fund for social workers.

**1930**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Baker Building*

Josephine Barbour assigned to "patients of moderate means." Cannon insists patients need social services without regard for income or social status. Quickly physicians began requesting assistance for their private patients in the Phillips House.



9-bed room – \$24 per week  
4-bed room – \$4 a day  
2-bed room – \$5 a day  
Single room – \$6 and \$6.50 a day  
Operating room fee – \$15  
Delivery room fee – \$15  
Maximum professional fee – \$150

**1939**

**OFFICE SPACE:**

*Enlarged Corner*



**1931**

**EDUCATION:**

*Director Named*

Salaried from the Cabot Fund, Harriett Bartlett (*below center*) joins as educator. She studies the functions of medical social work and the role of social workers in the teaching of medical students.



**1936**

**PRACTICE:**

*Home Care for Children with Heart Disease*

Social worker institutes "In-Bed Club" and "In-Bed Magazine" for children with rheumatic fever. A "Mothers Club" and summer craft and educational programs are initiated.



**1946**

J. Barbour receives U.S. government's Medal of Freedom

**1949**

Boston Housing Authority administers funds for urban renewal

**1950**

Ida Cannon receives honorary doctorate from Boston University

**1954**

Brown v. Board of Education mandates school desegregation



**1955**

All social work specialty groups join to become NASW

**1955**

Peak of polio epidemic

**1956**

Salk polio vaccine made available to the public



1942

**DISASTER:**

*Cocoaanut Grove Fire*

Social workers assist relatives seeking to identify victims, serve as liaison to the Red Cross and counsel victims and families. Ida Cannon and Dorothy Kellogg publish their work in the "Annals of Surgery" and "The Family" in 1943.



1942

**WAR:**

Granted a leave of absence, J. Barbour, Cannon's assistant, joins the MGH Hospital Unit. Later she is promoted to Field Director for Red Cross supervising all medical social workers in Mediterranean.



1942

**ORGANIZATION:**

*Staff Shortages*

The pressing demand for medical social workers in Army and civilian hospitals makes it difficult to secure well-prepared workers to fill vacancies. Staff is in constant contact with the Red Cross providing family health reports for servicemen.

1945

**NEW CHIEF:**

Josephine Barbour, on staff since 1926, and upon return from her duties in North Africa, becomes the second Director.



1945

**ANNUAL REPORT:**

The six most frequent problems presented by patients:

Chronic Disease: 1072  
Convalescent Care: 587  
Family Relationships: 544  
Financial problems: 476  
Patients Attitudes: 468  
Physical Handicap: 368

1947

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Staff Clinic for Employees*

1950

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Cardiac Service*

1950

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Emergency Ward*

1951

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Alcohol Clinic*

1960

Boston's West End begins redevelopment

1961

Harriett Bartlett writes *Social Work Practice in the Health Field*

1964

U.S. escalates Vietnam War



1964

Civil Rights Act



1964

War on Poverty increases services to the poor

1964

Food Stamp Act

1965

Medicare and Medicaid enacted





1955

EPIDEMIC:

Polio

"The unforgettable, haunting picture of over 400 polio patients." Social Service sets up a special polio office to extend support to victims and their families.



1949

EDUCATION:

Foreign Visitors

Visitors come from India, China, Greece, Japan, Sweden, Argentina, South Africa, Virgin Islands and England to train in Social Services.



1955

50th ANNIVERSARY

Over six hundred and thirty attend. Special guests include Miss Cherry Morris (England) and Mlle. Marie Terese Viellot (France). Staff includes: 35 professional social workers, 4 case aides and 12 secretaries.



1957

PRACTICE:

Social Work in Psychiatry

Social workers specialize: Adult (ward and clinics), Child, Community Mental Health, Alcoholism or the West End Research Project.

1963

PRACTICE:

Twenty-four hour coverage in the Acute

1964

NEW DIRECTOR

Eleanor Clark, MSW, Supervisor in Adult Psychiatry, is promoted, becoming the third Director.



1958

PRACTICE:

Fees

After careful study, fees are instituted for patients seen by social workers in Psychiatry. Average cost per interview: \$4.72. Average hourly pay for social workers: \$2.50. Fee is prorated based on length of interview.



1967

PRACTICE:

Patient Activity Center (PAC)

A unique social and day health program is developed for clinic patients with chronic illnesses. Many serve as MGH volunteers; some become employed.

1965

Older Americans Act



1967

St. Christopher's Hospice opens in London, England



1972

SSI consolidates Aid to Blind, Aid to Disabled and Old Age Assistance

1972

Chelsea HealthCare Center opens



1973

Roe v. Wade legalizes abortion



**1968**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Renal Dialysis and Transplant*

**1968**

**PRACTICE:**

*Transfer Office*

A team of nurse, social worker and administrative assistant develop services to assure that all patients receive appropriate care after discharge whether to home or to community facilities. Agreements are established between MGH Social Service and nursing homes. Consultations to ambulance companies improve patient transport. Contracts are made with the Boston VNA for an in-house liaison. Day care is established at the Don Orione Nursing Home. MGH house staff with social workers make visits to

**1973**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Chelsea Health Center*

Social worker joins the newly opened Chelsea Health Center. Is soon named Unit Chief of Mental Health and Social Services, which rapidly expands to serve the entire Chelsea community – including immigrants from many countries. Many innovative outreach programs characterize practice.

**1968**

**PRACTICE:**

*Continuing Care Planning Unit*

For the first time nurses are hired in a Social Service Department. They are responsible for tailoring patients' individual discharge plans and for evaluating nursing homes.



**1978**

**PRACTICE:**

*Family Care Program*

The first hospital-based, state funded, foster home service offers an alternative to institutional living for adults who need care and supervision. Nurse/social worker teams match patients to families and provide ongoing oversight to both patient and family.



**1968**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Bunker Hill HealthCare Center*

Social worker joins new Family Health Service. Major focus of early work is care of the chronically mentally ill. Social Service Unit expands staff and community-based programs.

**1970**

**ANNUAL REPORT**

"Poverty, isolation and depression are predominant problems in our caseload. Alcoholism, drug usage, requests for assistance with unwanted pregnancies and problems of family breakdown leading to neglect and abuse of children are increasingly reasons for referral. It is reported that traditional social agencies fail to encounter or assist many of this population. Perhaps it is our medical setting which encourages the most needful to our door."

**1978**

**PRACTICE:**

*Child Protection*

The Mental Health and Social Service Unit of the Chelsea Health Center receives state grant to provide comprehensive services to all at-risk children in the city of Chelsea. First time that child protection services are under the auspices of a health center.

**1973**

Medicare extended to the disabled



**1974**

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act funds programs



**1977**

Massachusetts requires licensure of social workers



**1968**

Charlestown HealthCare Center opens

**1979**

NASW adopts Code of Ethics



**MGH INSTITUTE**  
OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

**1980**

**PRACTICE:**

*Screening of all Admissions*

Social Service initiates the screening of all admissions using criteria based on diagnosis, age, demographic characteristics and living arrangements. Allows early identification of patients at risk for discharge planning problems.

**1980**

**EDUCATION:**

*Institute of Health Professions Opens*

Barbara Berkman, DSW directs new certificate program in social work. Begins as pre-MSW program and transitions to a post-MSW program.

**1987**

**RESEARCH:**

*New Position*

Research and Quality Assurance Program initiated. Grants from American Cancer Society fund post-graduate Social Work Oncology Traineeships.

**1987**

**PRACTICE:**

*Coordinated Care Program*

Following a successful demonstration funded by a Robert Wood Johnson Grant, a nurse/social worker team evaluates and coordinates the care of frail elders in their own homes.



**1980**

**75th Anniversary**

Staff social worker receives prestigious award from Harvard University's Ella Lyman Cabot Trust.



**1985**

**NEW DIRECTOR**

Evelyn Bonander, MSW, comes from Barnes Hospital and Washington University Medical Center in St. Louis, Missouri to be the fourth Director.



**1990**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Fox Hill Village*

Health team (social worker, nurse, physician) opens Wellness Center for residents of MGH affiliated retirement village in Westwood.

**1987**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Revere HealthCare Center*  
Social worker is hired. Early work includes special services to immigrant Cambodians enabling them to fully utilize and benefit from medical services. Program grows and new staff is added.

**1993**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*AIDS and HIV*

**1994**

**PRACTICE:**

*Obstetrics*

After 50 years, Obstetrics returns to the MGH. Simultaneously social workers are hired to develop broad in- and outpatient services. Social worker previously added in the Fertility Center (IVF).

**1981**

U.S. reports its 1st AIDS case



**1981**

Revere HealthCare Center opens

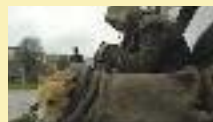


**1984**

Friends of MGH Cancer Center, strong supporter of Social Work

**1987**

McKinney Homeless Assistance Act addresses needs of the homeless



**1990**

Americans with Disabilities Act is passed



**1990**

MGH Employee Assistance Program is organized

**1994**

**PRACTICE:**

*Community Resource Center*

The center provides clinicians with computerized access to information about community services and public benefits. Updates staff on legislative activities enabling timely and effective advocacy. Resource specialists assist cancer patients with transportation and accommodations.

**1995**

**PRACTICE:**

*Major Role Changes*

Social work joins in restructuring of patient care. Continuing Care nurses transfer to Case Management which assumes responsibility for discharge planning. Social workers focus on clinical work collaborating with all on health care team.

**1996**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*Palliative Care Service*

**1996**

**PRACTICE:**

*Cancer Resource Room (CRR)*

The CRR offers a unique blend of clinical support and educational resources for cancer patients and their families. Hosts support, educational and wellness groups.



**1997**

**PRACTICE:**

*HAVEN Program*

Social worker with staff of advocates begins program of services to victims of domestic violence. Program expands in collaboration with the EAP to employees and grows to include deployed advocates at Chelsea and Revere Health Centers.



**1997**

**PRACTICE:**

*HOPES Program*

This unique, multidisciplinary program offers educational and support workshops for cancer patients and their families. Also sponsors wellness programs like yoga, music, expressive arts, massage.



**1995**

**FIRST SOCIAL WORKER:**

*MGH Senior Health*

Social worker joins new Geriatric Practice. With additional staff, develops MGH SeniorHealthWise to service the local community of seniors providing health and wellness programs, screenings, education and linkage to social and health services.



**1996**

**PRACTICE:**

*Cancer Center*

MGH Cancer Center reorganizes into Disease Centers. Social workers are requested as specialists for Breast, Brain Tumor; Bone Marrow; GI, GU, Gyn, Head and Neck, Hematology, Melanoma, Proton Beam, Sarcoma, Thoracic, Pediatrics and Radiation. Social work staff and program expand.

**1997**

**ORGANIZATION:**

*Collaborative Leadership Teams*

The Social Service Department reorganizes as Patient Care Services is restructured. Structure becomes: Leadership Team, Specialty Programs, nine Self-Managed Staff Teams and Steering Committee.



**1995**

Partners HealthCare forms: MGH joins with Brigham & Women's Hospital



**1995**

Case Management assumes responsibility for discharge planning

**1995**

Community Benefits Program partners with social work in community outreach



**1996**

Welfare Reform enacted: creates Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, ending categorical programs

**2000**

North End Health Center joins MGH Partners HealthCare

**2001**

September 11, 2001





**1998**

**PRACTICE:**

*PACT Program*

In response to the Chelsea community's concern about violence, the Police Action Counseling Team is formed to address the needs of children witnessing violence. Chelsea HealthCenter social workers join Chelsea Police reaching out to children.



**2003**

**DISASTER:**

*Rhode Island Fire*

Social workers organize a center providing services to families seeking identity of, and information on, victims of night club explosion and fire. Families and the victims admitted receive ongoing

**2001**

**PRACTICE:**

*Backpacks*

Therapeutic backpacks help parents talk with their children about cancer, trauma, sudden illness or grief. Each pack has developmentally appropriate educational, comfort and expressive items.



**2000**

**PRACTICE:**

*Visiting Moms*

In collaboration with Community Benefits, experienced, paraprofessional, bicultural mothers are trained to visit and support new mothers (primarily immigrants and refugees) through the Chelsea Health Center and supervised by social worker.

**2005**

**NEW DIRECTOR:**

Ann Daniels MSW, PhD, is promoted from Clinical Director, becoming fifth Director.



**2003**

**AFFORDABLE LODGING:**

*Major Changes*

Beacon House opens in 1984, beautifully furnished by the Ladies



Visiting Committee. MGH at the Inn opens in 1996. In 2003, Beacon House is refurbished and MGH at the Inn moves to Somerville.

**2000**

**PRACTICE:**

*Child Protection Consultation Team*

Team of social worker and physicians provide 24-hour consultation to all clinicians caring for at-risk children.

**2003**

**ORGANIZATION:**

*Clinical Recognition Program*

Patient Care Services creates a program to formally recognize clinical staff for their expertise. Social workers participate in every aspect from design to implementation. Staff apply for recognition as Clinicians, Advanced Clinicians or Clinical Scholars.

**2005**

**DISASTER:**

*Tsunami in Indonesia*

Three social workers, along with other MGH clinicians, provide disaster relief aboard the USNS Mercy.



**2003**

War in Iraq begins



**2003**

Rhode Island nightclub fire

**2004**

Tsunami hits Asia

**2005**

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastate the Gulf States



**2005**

MGH Men Against Abuse: First hospital-based men's group committed to heightening awareness of violence against women

**2005**

MGH Cancer Center dedicates healing garden in the hospital's new Lawkey Building

