



Sunshine Private Hospital
part of **united** healthcare
Transforming Patient Care

Employee Spotlight



Tharushi Social Worker

What is a day in your life as a mental health Social Worker like?

In all honesty, no day is ever the same but that's what keeps the work I do interesting. During my day I facilitate 2 or 3 group therapy sessions as part of our inpatient therapy program based on therapeutic modalities such as: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT), Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness Based Interventions (MBI).

I provide individual therapy for patients which focuses on exploring therapeutic goals, skills interventions, expansion on group content and discharge planning. I facilitate family/carer meetings to support patients in communicating their needs and guiding family/carers in caring for their loved ones. In between all of that is liaising with our multidisciplinary team about patient care, writing progress notes, making referrals to support services for patients and challenging the urge to drink more than one coffee.



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What kind of education and training did you undergo to become a Social Worker?

I completed a Bachelor of Psychological Science in 2017 and Master of Social Work in 2019. As part of the Master's degree, I completed a total of 1000 hours of placement. My first placement was at the Royal Melbourne Hospital – Eating Disorders Inpatient and Day Program Services and my second placement was at Uniting ReGen – Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) Services.

What motivated you to become a Social Worker?

In 2011 I had the wonderful opportunity to go on a two-week mission trip to Myanmar organised by my school principal. It was the experience of spending time with children from orphanages and schools in combination with a developing interest in mental health that started me on this path. Social Work is known as a helping-profession, and I wanted my career to be driven by my purpose of passing on the act of kindness.

Why did you choose to focus on hospital-based mental health Social Work?

When patients come into hospital for an admission, they're often experiencing their most vulnerable times and it can feel daunting for patients to come into a hospital environment to receive mental health care. I enjoy supporting patients in helping them feel safe, providing therapy and exploring with patients what they hope to achieve. Just as it can be daunting to come into hospital, it can also feel the same way transitioning back into the community after an admission. My work as a Social Worker involves supporting patients to feel safe and empowered to leave the hospital with hope that they can rebuild, heal, and continue the path of where they want to be in life.

Working in a hospital means that our patients receive well-rounded care from Psychiatry, Nursing and Allied Health. I love working collaboratively with my team and seeing how we all bring our knowledge and experience together to create high quality patient-centred care. I value the learnings I have received from my colleagues across all disciplines as it has greatly impacted my knowledge and awareness.



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What are your favourite parts about being a Social Worker?

Often within the Social Work profession, the garden metaphor of planting seeds of possibility to promote growth is used to describe what we hope to do for our patients. The work that I do with our patients is with the intent to plant seeds of possibilities as part of their recovery, sometimes it's watering the seeds, and other times I have the honour of watching those seeds bloom and flourish. It's incredible to see the moment of realisation that patients have when they acknowledge and recognise the progress they have made. My favourite part is having the opportunity to contribute to a patient's transformation, create meaningful impact within their recovery and see the power of healing.

How has being a Social Worker impacted your life?

Being a Social Worker has allowed me to realise the importance of support and reflect on how I can cultivate it into my life. Since becoming a Social Worker, regular questions I ask myself are: What do I need from myself and/or others to feel supported? How can I support those around me? Within my work I have seen what feeling unsupported can do to people and I've also seen what an amazing difference it can make in a person when they receive the support they need, whether someone has given it to them, or they've found it within themselves.

What motivated you to join the team at Sunshine Private?

Being the first private mental health service in the Western area was what motivated me to join the team. It was an exciting opportunity that I knew I wanted as soon as I came across it, and I'm thankful to be a part of the wonderful team here. It has been rewarding work to contribute to developing the mental health service into what it is today and I'm proud of what our team has accomplished. I'm looking forward to seeing how we continue to grow as a service and increase accessibility for people to receive mental health care.





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What are your go-to mental health skills that you use on a regular basis to help support yourself and your patients?

Self-compassion and validation. When we're faced with adversity, we can become vulnerable to our inner critic and get swept up by disparaging thoughts. Self-compassion and validation can be hard to practice, however they can be powerful in healing our pain. Acknowledging when I'm not travelling well, validating how I feel and being compassionate in how I respond to my pain has always been effective in supporting my mental wellbeing, even when it was a challenge to use those skills.

The work I do with my patients incorporates self-compassion and validation approaches because it helps strengthen and nurture the relationship they have with themselves. It evolves the story of self from "I'm a complete failure" to "I'm proud of myself for trying."

Working in mental healthcare can come with different challenges and stressors – how do you care for yourself so that you can show up for your patients?

Anytime there are challenges and stressors, it's important to me that I share it with my team because in most cases I'm not alone in the experience. It can be comforting and validating for my colleagues and myself to know that we're going through a shared experience. Caring for myself can also look like taking a moment to pause and reflect, checking in with myself about what I may be needing and giving myself reassurance that I don't need to overextend my capacity. Sometimes it's the little reminders to hydrate and take a few deep breaths that can make a difference.

