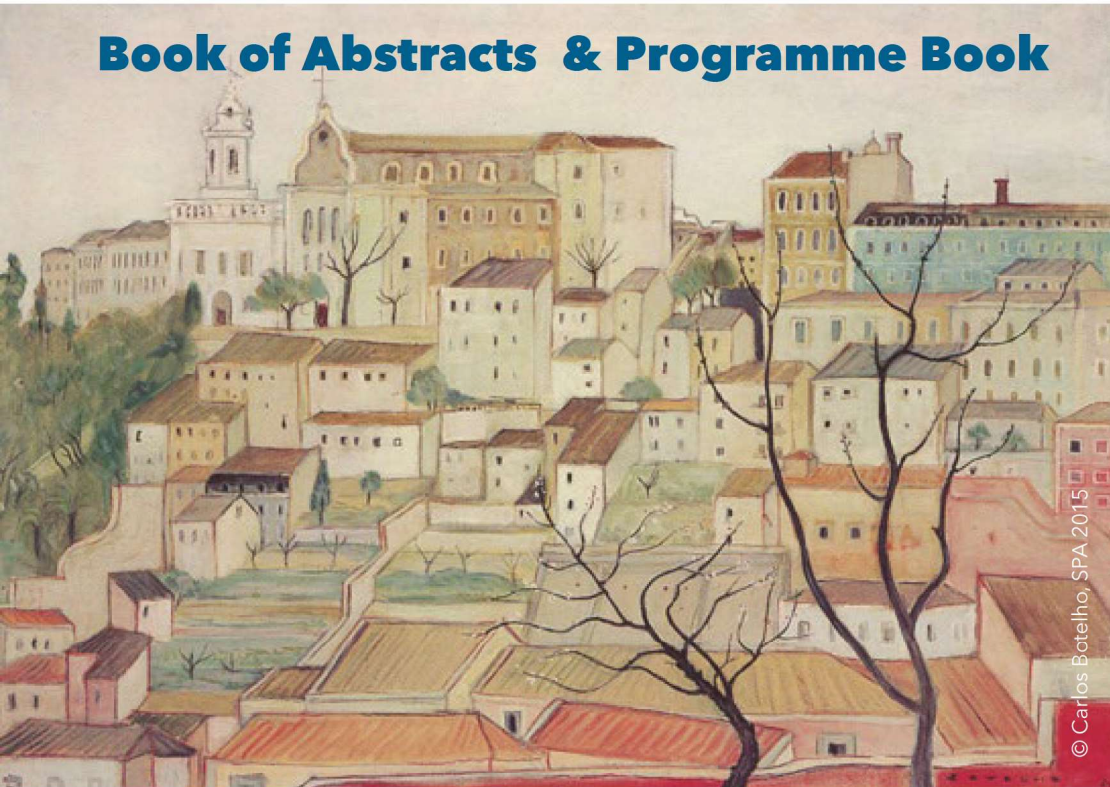


6th European Conference for Social Work Research

Reflective social work practices in contemporary societies:
dialogues and new pathways between praxis and research

Book of Abstracts & Programme Book



Catholic University of Portugal
Lisbon | 30 March - 1 April 2016



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CONTENTS

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW PANE

OPENING SESSION ||||||||||||||||

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

ABSTRACTS ||||||||||||||||||

ACCEPTED POSTERS ||||||||||||

PRE CONFERENCE PROGRAM

LIST OF ECSWR 2016 PARTICIP

LIST of ABSTRACTS | Please use

LIST of AUTHORS | Please use



Social work in a medical setting: reflection on inter-professional practice in a power imbalanced context

Silvia Fragon | Free University of Bozen / Bolzano

Keywords | social work in a medical setting, inter-professional practice, power dynamics

Research question

Social work in hospital setting has a long history; research has shown its value, but at the same time has revealed how it has always been fraught with tensions and contradictions. Many researches have connected the difficulties to a clash in perspective between the social and the medical cultures. Providing room for social work in hospital derives from a view of illness and health as connected to social as well as physical factors. Empirical evidence, though, shows how often social work is underutilized, or not properly considered. The point is that lack of understanding takes place in a context of strong power imbalance between medical and social profession within the hospital. Social workers are often dissatisfied with the level of cooperation and with the way they are involved in interventions with clients. Although there have been several studies on issue role and problems of hospital social work in the past, still the issue of cooperation in power imbalance situations represent an open issue.

Methods

This presentation is based on a qualitative study in South Tyrol, developed out of a cooperation between hospital social workers and the University. The research study explores the views of medical and social professions on the dynamics of inter-professional practice in a Hospital environment. Ten medical doctors, fourteen nurses, six social workers and six patients were interviewed and asked for their views on social work in hospital, their knowledge of it, their expectations, and experiences. All were asked critical incidents of good and bad cooperation.

First results

The interviews have allowed to identify both several points of friction between professions, such as a different time frame, and also elements that could constitute a good base for inter-professional practice, such as an

acknowledged need of social work. The main issue undermining cooperation is lack of recognition, knowledge and under-evaluation of social workers. It appears that the professional role and task of the weaker profession is not clear, and what the role and task of the weaker