The 4 Ps, 4 Rs, and 4 Ms

PURPOSE: To assist the social worker in assessing the client’s behavior and functioning within a social context.

DISCUSSION: For many years, Perlman’s (1957) 4 Ps (person, problem, place, and process) have proven useful to social workers as a way of organizing their thoughts about a client, his or her situation, and the agency context of social work intervention. Doremus (1976) suggests the 4 Rs (roles, reactions, relationships, and resources) as a way of conceptualizing assessment in health care settings. In addition, the authors offer the 4 Ms (motivation, meanings, management, and monitoring) as further reminders of important elements in social work intervention.

A blending of the 4 Ps, 4 Rs, and 4 Ms results in a 12-item, easily remembered conceptual tool that can help a worker sift through available data, organize it, and begin formulating an intervention plan. As used here, the word client refers to an individual. However, the underlying ideas that make up the 4 P/4 R/4 M can be applied to work with other client systems, including couples, families, or small groups.

The 4 Ps
1. Problem
   - What is the nature of the client’s problem or concern? Its cause, intensity, frequency, and duration?
   - How does the client define or describe it? How do others who know the client define it? How does the worker define it?
   - Can this problem or situation be changed? What aspects of the problem can feasibly be addressed in a change effort by the worker and client?
   - How effective have previous efforts by the client, agency, or worker been in dealing with this problem or concern?
   - Is the problem or situation an emergency that requires a rapid response?
   - What would the consequences be if the worker or agency does nothing for or with the client?

2. Person
   - How are the various dimensions of the whole person (e.g., physical, emotional social, economic, and spiritual) related to or affected by the client’s problem, concern, or situation?
   - What client strengths or assets can be used as a foundation on which to build an effective intervention plan and change process?
   - How might the client’s usual ways of thinking and behaving become barriers to dealing effectively with the problem or concern?

3. Place
   - What meaning does the client assign to his or her involvement with the agency (e.g., hopefulness, stigma, fear, humiliation, etc.)?
   - Can the agency provide the services needed by the client? If not, is referral to another agency likely to be effective?
   - Are the agency’s own procedures, policies, or methods somehow contributing to the client’s problems?
4. **Process**
   - What type of helping approach, method, or technique is the client likely to find acceptable?
   - What approach, method, or technique is likely to be effective?
   - How will the requirements of the helping process (time, fees, scheduling, etc.) affect the client's current roles and responsibilities?

5. **Roles**
   - What roles and responsibilities does the client have in life (e.g., parent, spouse, employee, etc.)?
   - What do others (e.g., family, employers, etc.) expect of the client?
   - How satisfied is the client with his or her role performance?

6. **Reactions**
   - What are the client's reactions (e.g., physical, behavioral, and emotional) to his or her problems, concerns, and situation?
   - How do these reactions compare to his or her usual patterns? Is the client in a state of crisis?

7. **Relationships**
   - What people are significant and meaningful parts of the client's life (e.g., family, peers, friends, etc.)?
   - How are they being affected by the client's problem or situation?
   - How is the behavior of significant others contributing to the client's current problem or situation?

8. **Resources**
   - What formal and informal resources has the client used in the past to cope with similar problems? Are these resources available to the client?
   - What new or additional resources are now needed by the client? Are they available? Is the client willing to use them?
   - Is the client eligible for or able to pay for needed services and programs?

9. **Motivation**
   - What does the client want to do about his or her problem or situation?
   - What discomfort or aversive factors are pushing the client toward action?
   - What factors of hope are pulling the client toward action?
   - What can be done to increase client motivation?

10. **Meanings**
    - What meaning does the client assign to his or her situation, and problems?
    - What ethnic, cultural, and religious beliefs and values are important to the client and relevant to the current problem or situation?

11. **Management**
    - How can the worker best use his or her limited time, energy, and resources to help the client deal with the problem or situation?
    - What overall plan or strategy will guide the worker's activity with the client?
    - How will work with this client affect the worker's other responsibilities?
12. Monitoring

- How will the worker monitor his or her impact on the client and evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention?
- How can the worker use peers, supervisors, or consultants to monitor and evaluate intervention?

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


11.15 Assessing a Client’s Social Functioning

**PURPOSE:** To examine and assess the various dimensions of a person’s social functioning.

**DISCUSSION:** As explained in Chapter 1, the social work profession seeks to enhance social functioning and to prevent and correct problems of social functioning. The concept of *social functioning*, when applied to an individual, can be thought of as the person’s motivation, capacity, and opportunity to meet his or her basic needs and perform his or her major social roles such as those of parent, spouse, partner, family member, employee, citizen, and so on.

At a fundamental level, assessing a client’s social functioning involves the client and social worker examining various facets of the client’s need-meeting activity and role performance and then drawing conclusions about his or her current level of functioning. Depending on the client’s presenting concerns or problem, some areas are examined in more depth than others.

The statements in the following sections should serve to remind the social worker of the various dimensions of an individual’s social functioning. Each statement describes a prosocial behavior or situation. If a client’s current behavior or situation departs significantly from the description given, he or she is likely facing some special challenges or experiencing problems in social functioning. Because all of the statements are written in positive language, they can be viewed collectively as a list of possible client strengths. This list can also provide a starting point for the social worker who is writing goals and objectives to be included in a service agreement or treatment plan (see Items 12.5 and 12.6).

**Adults**

*Fundamentals of Independent Living*

- The client manages basic self-care tasks such as bathing, toileting, eating, and food preparation.
- The client is sufficiently mobile, has the range of body movement, and possesses the energy necessary to safely care for self.