

EXPERIENCES OF ADVANCED PEER SUPPORT WORKERS AS THEY PROGRESS FROM PEER TO PROFESSIONAL: A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION

Surey J^{1,2,3}, Gibbons J², Leonard, M^{2,4}, Francis M², Story A^{2,5}, Maclellan J⁶

¹*Institute of Global Health, University College London, UK*

²*Find and Treat, UCLH NHS Trust, London, UK*

³*Universidad Autonoma Madrid, Spain*

⁴*Groundswell, London, UK*

⁵*Collaborative Centre for Inclusion Health, University College London, UK*

⁶*Oxford Research Nurses for Immunology and Inflammatory Diseases | ORNIID, University of Oxford*

Background:

Peer support has been used as a mechanism to facilitate active engagement with healthcare among underserved populations. The HepCare project upskilled experienced peer support workers to become equal members of a service provider team, taking on advanced clinical roles normally carried out by medical or nursing specialists. This care provider unit is unique. We aimed to qualitatively assess the experience of advanced peer support workers (APSWs) themselves as they progressed and assumed professional roles.

Methods:

A case study approach was taken in which interviews were carried out amongst a selected group of experienced peers to explore the advanced peer support worker role that was developed. Thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted, refined and finalised in a workshop with the research team and participants.

Results:

Three themes were extracted from the data that explore the peer support worker's transition to case worker:

- Transition to integration
- Retaining 'peerness'
- Practising critical resilience

The analysis found that the advocacy and support enacted by the case workers through the HepCare project offered purpose and meaning, while integration into a new social group, buffered by the supportive context of the programme, facilitated a motivating sense of worth.

A set of recommendations were produced which included: a clear HCV training and career pathway for peers; an appropriate salary to reflect the advanced role; relapse prevention measures and management; local, national and international networks of peer workers for better advocacy and support; improved stakeholder engagement with evidence presented in an accessible manner to aid policy makers in funding peer support groups linked to HCV treatment services.

Conclusion:

The programme offers a platform for the development and enactment of critical resilience among APSWs as they transition to a case worker role that is positioned firmly within the healthcare provider team.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose