Peer Support Improves Outcomes And Treatment Access In Opioid Substitution Settings

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“ADVANCING THE HEALTH, RIGHTS AND DIGNITY OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS ILLICITLY IN NSW”

About NUAA

The NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peer-based drug user organisation and the peak body in NSW representing people who do or have used drugs. We work with the Ministry of Health and present the consumer perspective on health service delivery.

NUAA has a long involvement in consumer engagement and advocacy in a variety of settings. This paper describes the work of a peer engagement officer in and OST clinic who worked to promote access to hepatitis C treatment with clinic clients.

Consumers often view Opiate Substitution Treatment (OST) clinics as punitive environments with little flexibility and literal and figurative barriers preventing patient-focused care. The practices of many OST clinics are not conducive to engagement in health care. The target of hep C elimination requires that we change this paradigm.
Things that may get you exited:
“being noisy, disrupting or in any way annoying”

Things that will incur an administrative cost:
- ringing the clinic. You already have an appointment and if staff have to work to help you, you must pay
- requesting a variation of the script
- missing an appointment, even if you have an “excuse”

Only come to the clinic five minutes before your appointment but don’t be late.

6. It is your RESPONSIBILITY to:

(3) KEEP A POSITIVE BALANCE TO YOUR SECURITY DEPOSIT. This is held to cover any breaches of these rules that require payment of “Administrative Cost” for services not covered by Medicare and to cover the administration cost of your future “exit” form requirements.

(4) KEEP YOUR PHONE DETAILS UPTO DATE if we can’t contact you on the number you have given to us it is your fault

(5) ONLY COME TO THE CLINIC 5 MINUTES BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT. If you arrive early you will be sent away, remember if you are Loitering you will be exited, go to the Centro shops.

(6) NOT TO BE LATE, if you are greater than 5 minutes late, you will be send away till the end of the clinic

(7) BE AWARE OF PUBLIC HOLIDAYS AND ORGANISE YOUR TAKE-A-WAYS. All scripts cover pharmacy closures. You can not get more than 4 take a ways at any time.

(8) NOT BE NOISY, DISRUPTIVE, INTRUSIVE OR IN ANY WAY ANNOYING while at the clinic. You will be warned and exited if you do not change your behavior.
The intervention

Peer support consists of a worker with lived experience of injecting drug use and hepatitis C working in treatment settings appropriate to their skill base. For this project, NUAA upskilled a well-regarded consumer engagement officer in HCV treatment and support in an inner city drug and alcohol service.

The role involved:
• Acting as a go-between the services and consumers
• Advocating for consumers where required
• Providing brief educational interventions on hepatitis C, transmission, testing, monitoring and treatment
• Encouraging connection with health care providers for testing, monitoring and treatment
• Providing support to people as they navigated the new hepatitis C treatment pathways

Evaluation methods

We undertook to evaluate the acceptability and efficacy of this intervention

Survey examined:
• Overall satisfaction with service
• Acceptability of PSW role
• Efficacy of the PSW role

A total of 47 clients completed the survey (out of approximately 150 service clients)
Survey was administered by a PSW who was not connected with the service
Demographics

The majority of participants were male (75%),
Aged over 35 years (58%)
Long term service users (77% had attended the clinic for at least 1 year)

Results Connecting

Has the PSW chatted with you in the last 12 months?
- Yes: 80%
- No: 20%

PSW improved the atmosphere?
- Yes: 90%
- No: 5%

How satisfied are you with the PSW?
- Very Unsatisfied
- Unsatisfied
- Average
- Satisfied
- Very Satisfied
- Unknown
Did the PSW advocate for you with Rankin?

The PSW had discussed hepatitis C with 30% of those surveyed.

- Verses;
  - Doctor (20%)
  - Dispensing staff (10%)
  - Hepatitis C nurse (5%)

Results

Outcomes

In the last 12mths who discussed hep C with you?

- Dispensing Staff
- Case Manager
- PSW
- Doctor
- Reception
- NURM
- Hep C Nurse
- Friend
- Other

Nearly half (47%) of participants reported that the Peer Support Worker was involved in the decision making process to proceed with treatment.

Indicating that this support was instrumental in the decision.
Let’s Get Personal!

I feel my joint status as a consumer of the service, combined with my formal peer support role helps to reach out to others who have become distrustful and disconnected from the service.

I have a huge sense of achievement in the positive changes have occurred due to the work I do at the Opiate Treatment Centre.

Sharing a good news story....

Learnings

• Peer support worker was highly effective in engaging with OST clients around HCV treatment
• Peer support can facilitate hepatitis C treatment access in Opiate Substitution Treatment settings.
• Peer Support Worker roles must be considered in all high-volume Opiate Substitution Treatment Clinics in order to ensure equitable access to health care.
• Further, the ongoing support of a peer through the testing, decision making process and the treatment regime is the next evolution of ensuring the most vulnerable and marginalised injecting drug users and people in opiate treatment can and do access and complete hepatitis C treatment.
Recommendations

- Structural norms in clinical practice inhibit discussion, education and support

- Peer support “meets people where they live” providing opportunities for engagement

- Peer support will be essential to achieving the target of hepatitis C elimination

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