

Greater Victoria Peer Support Pilot: Pre-Pilot Results: January 2023

Introduction

The Saanich Peninsula Physicians Society, South Island Division of Practice, South Island Medical Staff Association, and Victoria Division of Practice are working together to pilot a peer support program in Greater Victoria. To understand the needs of local physicians, a brief pre-pilot survey was distributed via electronic newsletter to members of all four organizations. A total of 62 responses were received. The purpose of this document is to summarize findings from the pre-pilot survey.

Evidence of Need and Benefits of Peer Support

The majority (71%) of respondents indicated that they would have benefited from peer support in the past year, had it been available to them. The median response regarding how often peer support would have been beneficial was 1-2 times.

Table 1: Number of Times Respondents Would Have Benefited from a Peer Support Conversation in the Past Year

Response	N	%
I would never feel comfortable with peer support	3	4.8%
No times in the past year	15	24.2%
1-2 times in the past year (median response)	25	40.3%
3-4 times in the past year	12	19.4%
5 or more times in the past year	7	11.3%
Total	62	100.0%

The most frequently identified reasons for needing peer support were because of burnout or moral injury (77%), in response to an adverse clinical event or patient outcome (77%); and in response to a patient or college complaint (67%).

Table 2: Reasons/Situations in which Respondents Think a Peer Support Conversation Might be Helpful (n=61)

Response	N	%
Burnout/ moral injury	47	77.1%
Adverse clinical event or patient outcome	47	77.1%
Patient or college complaint	41	67.2%
Interpersonal/ relational conflict with a patient or colleague	38	62.3%
Acute life stressor that impacts your work	31	54.1%
Other*	10	16.4%

* Other responses included (some provided multiple answers and some themes were mentioned by more than one person):

- Specific life stressors: family illness, work-life balance, substance use, personal health issue
- Stressors related to professional administration: clinic management, running a business, being new to practice, lacking coverage for personal needs (e.g., illness, caregiver responsibilities)
- Interpersonal challenges not categorized as conflict, such as having difficult conversations
- Desire to talk through challenging clinical cases
- Stress related to online comments, e.g. patient ratings
- "Health system breakdown"

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Concerns about Peer Support

The most common concerns about peer support that might prevent respondents from utilizing the program were privacy concerns (58%); being embarrassed to reach out (58%); and a lack of time to connect with someone (55%).

Table 3: Concerns that Respondents Think Might Prevent Them From Reaching Out to Peer Support (n=62)

Response	N	%
Privacy concerns	36	58.1%
Embarrassed to reach out	36	58.1%
Lack of time to connect with someone	34	54.8%
Discomfort talking about emotions or personal issues	27	43.6%
Not sure if it would really help	24	38.7%
Fear of reprisal or consequences	17	27.4%
Other*	10	16.1%

* Other responses included

- That it would not occur to them to reach out, or that they do not feel a need to
- Already having someone to talk to
- Concern that patient confidentiality could be broken
- Fear that information would be conveyed to the College
- “It might help me, but would it change the situation?”

Other Considerations

An open-ended question at the end of the survey asked respondents to relay any other issues that they would like taken into consideration in order to feel safe and comfortable during peer support conversations; 17 respondents provided a comment. Key themes included:

- Considerations around matching (e.g., age, gender, practice profile, life experience)
- Ensuring choice for peers so that the relationship is comfortable
- Reiterating concerns about privacy of information, with some comments suggesting specific actions. Including having the option of online interactions that feel more anonymous and having a guarantee that there would be no reporting of confidential information with colleagues, the health authority, or the College
- Importance of training and a nonjudgmental stance on the part of supporters
- Importance of ensuring that supporters are also supported
- Reiterating the value of peer support for those who are new or don't have others to reach out to
- Suggestions for expanding from one-on-one peer support, including M and M rounds for the community and arranging referrals to peers who are providing in-person care or treatment
- Reiterating concerns about embarrassment
- Noting that they are already providing and receiving informal peer support to/from colleagues
- Positive comments about the idea of a peer support program:
 - “Thank you for arranging this. Great idea.”
 - This is an ESSENTIAL part of managing as a doc and I support this initiative 100%.”