New ways of working in mental health services: Assessing and informing the emergence of peer worker roles

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Abstract
Mental Health Trusts and voluntary sector mental health organisations are increasingly employing people who have used mental health services to work in or alongside mental health teams. This study will explore the introduction of these Peer Worker (PW) roles employing a comparative case study design. In six Mental Health NHS Trusts and six voluntary sector organisations employing PWs in varying roles across England, one to one interviews will be undertaken with PWs, mental health professionals, service users, managers, referrers and commissioners and documentary evidence gathered with the aim of testing a conceptual framework informed by the existing evidence base (Gillard, Edwards et al 2010, Repper 2010), organisational research literature on emergence of roles & experiential insight from service user members of PEER (Peer Expertise in Education and Research) at St George’s, University of London (SGLU). This collaborative study will inform future service development via inbuilt organisational learning loops and production of guidance, training tools and online resources.

Background

- Widespread introduction of Peer Worker (PW) roles in UK mental health services seems likely with strong, sometimes economically driven, policy rationale in response to quality and productivity challenges of the (DH 2010) Health White Paper.
- Peer support is seen as facilitating mental health recovery (SCIE 2008) self care (DH 2006) and personalisation (DH 2010) agendas.
- There is growing evidence for the potential beneficial outcomes of PW based interventions
- However earlier research (Gillard, Edwards et al 2010) found lack of clarity around roles and concerns re appropriate support for PWs in NHS.
- Organisational research literature shows that the introduction of new roles into established teams or alongside other roles often presents challenges.

Aims

- To test the evidence base on emergence of Peer Worker roles in a range of UK mental health service settings (statutory and voluntary sector)
- To identify extent to which facilitators and barriers to successful introduction of Peer Worker roles are generalisable across or specific to particular service contexts
- To develop and make available knowledge, practical tools & guidance for mental health organisations and managers around recruiting, training and supporting introduction of Peer Worker roles in delivery of services

Conceptual Framework
This study is underpinned by a conceptual framework informed by the existing evidence base, organisational research literature and experiential insight from service users

Fig 1 Conceptual Framework for investigating the introduction of Peer Worker roles in mental health services

Methods

Design Comparative Case Study;

Setting Twelve contrasting case study sites in three regions of England: Six statutory sector cases (provided or commissioned by MH NHS Trusts), Six Voluntary sector cases (including service user-led models). At least two BME community based initiatives

Fig 2 Data Collection

Data Analysis Ratings of barriers and facilitators to PW roles will identify patterns across and within specific case sites. Triangulation of documentary and interview data & stakeholder perspectives will explore model fidelity & challenges in implementation.

Qualitative analysis of interviewee’s personal experiences will engage whole research team in discussion of preliminary analyses in order to integrate the range of expertise and experience of the team in interpretation of findings.

The Research Team

This project employs a collaborative approach to research.

An independently chaired Project Board will include a Project Advisory Group representing service user interests alongside the Research Team with its academic & service user research, clinical, management & policy perspectives.

Service users (SU) from Peer have been involved in the development of this project alongside an experienced SU researcher, SU trainer, Director of SU involvement at Together Research will be undertaken by experienced SU Researcher(s).

Sharing the Learning

- Preliminary findings will be reported back to site feedback workshops
- Guidelines and training tools on employing Peer Workers will be produced
- A handbook and online resources will be made available to MH Trusts, managers, service users, commissioners via the Project Website www-peerworker.sglu.ac.uk
- Knowledge will be shared through service user, voluntary sector, NHS leadership and management networks as well as to academic and professional audiences

References


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