

Context and Need

“Peer support programs offer information and psychosocial support, reduce social isolation, and connect patients and caregivers to others with similar health issues”

With social workers having limited ability to provide regular, ongoing support to cancer patients, there is a gap in patient care.

This is complicated by barriers in affordability and access to mental health care as well. Further, patients often feel lack of connection with providers who haven’t experienced cancer/chronic illness.

Program Design & Activities

Review of Peer Support Group Practices

- Establishing leadership and ground rules
- Informed consent/limits of confidentiality
- Recruitment, advertising
- Asking open-ended questions and leadership style
- Benefits and limits of outside interactions

Format

- Check-in
- Member Presentations/Planned topics
- Topical Exercises
- Gaining Feedback
- Confidentiality Reminder
- Contact Information

Vignettes

Comfort Agreement Ideas

Tips for Working with Difficult Group Members

Benefits and Risks of Facilitator Sharing Personal

Illness/Recovery Story

Listening Skills

Strategies for Success

Core Competencies for Peers

Peer Support Group Modalities

Facilitator Role

Resource Review

Processing Grief

Complicated Grief

Coping Strategies

Self Care

Outcomes and Impact

Benefits:

- Hope
- Support
- Motivation
- Increased self-esteem and efficacy
- Sense of control
- Sense of belonging
- Improved quality of life

Challenges

- Barriers to supporting another person
- Boundaries
- Geography
- Matching
- Knowing when more clinical support is necessary
- Transferences/Counter-transference
- Disruptive group members / dominated by complaints
- Lack of confidentiality
- Emotional entanglement
- Inappropriate or unsound medical advice
- Competitive comparison of whose condition or experiences is worse

Lessons Learned

Difficulties in managing personal emotions/connectedness to the topic

Managing inappropriateness of medical advice giving

Navigating challenging group members

Coaching on providing outside referrals

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