New ways of working in mental health services: a qualitative, comparative case study assessing and informing the emergence of new peer worker roles in mental health services in England

Steve Gillard,1* Christine Edwards,2 Sarah Gibson,1 Jess Holley3 and Katherine Owen1

1Division of Population Health Sciences and Education, St George’s, University of London, London, UK
2Kingston Business School, Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames, UK
3Joint Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, St George’s, University of London, London, UK, and Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames, UK

*Corresponding author

Declared competing interests of authors: none

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published July 2014
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02190

Plain English summary

New ways of working in mental health services
Health Services and Delivery Research 2014; Vol. 2: No. 19
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr02190

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
Plain English summary

Peer workers are increasingly being employed in mental health services in England. Peer workers are people with personal experiences of mental health problems, employed to use those experiences to help other people. There is some research about the benefits of peer workers but most of it is from outside England. The aim of this research is to find out if that international evidence is useful in helping to develop new peer worker roles in England.

We interviewed 89 peer workers, coworkers, managers and service users about their views and experiences of the peer worker role. We interviewed people in 10 different mental health services, in NHS mental health trusts and voluntary sector organisations. Some peer workers were working on psychiatric wards, some in community services and others in projects for black and minority ethnic communities.

We found a lot of good practice in the projects we studied, although there was room for improvement around pay, training and management for peer workers. Some things were done better in the voluntary sector, where peer workers had been introduced a few years earlier. Making new roles fit with existing structures was a challenge in the NHS. The most important issues were around valuing and supporting peer workers to use their personal experiences of mental health problems. Organisations needed to be flexible and allow traditional ways of doing things to change if peer workers were to do their jobs well and stay well themselves.
Health Services and Delivery Research

ISSN 2050-4349 (Print)
ISSN 2050-4357 (Online)

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

Editorial contact: nihredit@southampton.ac.uk

The full HS&DR archive is freely available to view online at www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr. Print-on-demand copies can be purchased from the report pages of the NIHR Journals Library website: www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Criteria for inclusion in the Health Services and Delivery Research journal

Reports are published in Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) if (1) they have resulted from work for the HS&DR programme or programmes which preceded the HS&DR programme, and (2) they are of a sufficiently high scientific quality as assessed by the reviewers and editors.

HS&DR programme

The Health Services and Delivery Research (HS&DR) programme, part of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), was established to fund a broad range of research. It combines the strengths and contributions of two previous NIHR research programmes: the Health Services Research (HSR) programme and the Service Delivery and Organisation (SDO) programme, which were merged in January 2012.

The HS&DR programme aims to produce rigorous and relevant evidence on the quality, access and organisation of health services including costs and outcomes, as well as research on implementation. The programme will enhance the strategic focus on research that matters to the NHS and is keen to support ambitious evaluative research to improve health services.

For more information about the HS&DR programme please visit the website: www.netscc.ac.uk/hsdr/

This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its proceeding programmes as project number 10/1008/15. The contractual start date was in September 2010. The final report began editorial review in June 2013 and was accepted for publication in November 2013. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health.

© Queen's Printer and Controller of HMSO 2014. This work was produced by Gillard et al. under the terms of a commissioning contract issued by the Secretary of State for Health. This issue may be freely reproduced for the purposes of private research and study and extracts (or indeed, the full report) may be included in professional journals provided that suitable acknowledgement is made and the reproduction is not associated with any form of advertising. Applications for commercial reproduction should be addressed to: NIHR Journals Library, National Institute for Health Research, Evaluation, Trials and Studies Coordinating Centre, Alpha House, University of Southampton Science Park, Southampton SO16 7NS, UK.

Published by the NIHR Journals Library (www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk), produced by Prepress Projects Ltd, Perth, Scotland www.prepress-projects.co.uk).
Health Services and Delivery Research Editor-in-Chief

Professor Ray Fitzpatrick  Professor of Public Health and Primary Care, University of Oxford, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editor-in-Chief

Professor Tom Walley  Director, NIHR Evaluation, Trials and Studies and Director of the HTA Programme, UK

NIHR Journals Library Editors

Professor Ken Stein  Chair of HTA Editorial Board and Professor of Public Health, University of Exeter Medical School, UK

Professor Andree Le May  Chair of NIHR Journals Library Editorial Group (EME, HS&DR, PGfAR, PHR journals)

Dr Martin Ashton-Key  Consultant in Public Health Medicine/Consultant Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Professor Matthias Beck  Chair in Public Sector Management and Subject Leader (Management Group), Queen's University Management School, Queen's University Belfast, UK

Professor Aileen Clarke  Professor of Public Health and Health Services Research, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick, UK

Dr Tessa Crilly  Director, Crystal Blue Consulting Ltd, UK

Dr Peter Davidson  Director of NETSCC, HTA, UK

Ms Tara Lamont  Scientific Advisor, NETSCC, UK

Professor Elaine McColl  Director, Newcastle Clinical Trials Unit, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, UK

Professor William McGuire  Professor of Child Health, Hull York Medical School, University of York, UK

Professor Geoffrey Meads  Professor of Health Sciences Research, Faculty of Education, University of Winchester, UK

Professor Jane Norman  Professor of Maternal and Fetal Health, University of Edinburgh, UK

Professor John Powell  Consultant Clinical Adviser, National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), UK

Professor James Raftery  Professor of Health Technology Assessment, Wessex Institute, Faculty of Medicine, University of Southampton, UK

Dr Rob Riemsma  Reviews Manager, Kleijnen Systematic Reviews Ltd, UK

Professor Helen Roberts  Professor of Child Health Research, University College London, UK

Professor Helen Snooks  Professor of Health Services Research, Institute of Life Science, College of Medicine, Swansea University, UK

Please visit the website for a list of members of the NIHR Journals Library Board:
www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/about/editors

Editorial contact:  nihredit@southampton.ac.uk