

PEER SUPPORT IMPROVES OUTCOMES AND TREATMENT ACCESS IN OPIOID SUBSTITUTION (OST) SETTINGS

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Introduction: Consumers often view OST clinics as punitive environments with little flexibility and literal and figurative barriers preventing patient-focussed care. In light of the push to eliminate hepatitis C and engage marginalised patients, it is important to question this paradigm. The NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) has a long involvement in consumer engagement and advocacy with this paper describing the implementation several projects in OST settings engaging Peer Support Workers (PSW).

Method: NUAA PSW workers worked in clinical settings in consultation with management. Online and paper surveys were used to determine efficacy. This paper describes several measures including routine data collection and a targeted survey with 47 OST clients.

Key Findings: PSW is an effective model of engaging with engagement with a diverse client group across wide range of issues. Survey data found that most clients (80%) had contact with the PSW and most (72%) highly satisfied with their engagement. This engagement was meaningful with 82% stating that the PSW advocated for them with clinic staff and 90% reporting that the PSW role improved the atmosphere at the clinic. The PSW was the most frequent point of contact for hepatitis C information in the clinic with 30% of clients receiving their information via this channel.

Discussions and Conclusions: OST clinics are frequently the primary point of engagement for people with opioid dependency. It is imperative that we move to wholistic, patient-centred models of treatment in these settings. Shifting the existing culture requires consumer engagement with peer support an important facet of this work.