







# Assessing the Well-Being of Peer Supporters in a Pandemic

Peer support is an effective approach to caring for healthcare professionals who face burnout, secondary traumatic stress, mental health symptoms, and even suicide. Because the emotional well-being of medical professionals has a significant impact on quality of care and patient safety, providing emotional support for healthcare workers is critical. The role of trained peer supporters has increased over the past decade to meet this need.



A study from the September 2022 issue of *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety (JQPS)* suggests that trained teams of peer supporters, an essential underpinning of organizational support during COVID-19, reported high levels of burnout and numerous well-being challenges related to the pandemic. The study proposes that maintaining effective peer support programs during an ongoing pandemic requires healthcare organizations to study and support the well-being of healthcare professional peer supporters and provides recommendations to help organizations respond to the changing and growing needs of those caring for caregivers.

## The study aimed to:

- 1  assess peer supporter burnout, compassion satisfaction, and secondary traumatic stress
- 2  analyze differences by role, age, years in healthcare, and working in high-risk areas
- 3  determine themes among the challenges, needs, and successful well-being strategies
- 4  synthesize quantitative results, qualitative findings, and best practices to provide recommendations for enhancing and sustaining peer support programs and peer supporter well-being.

**375 peer supporters completed the study survey across 5 U.S. hospital systems in 2021.**



## The study found:

Participants recorded low secondary traumatic stress overall and moderate to high levels of compassion satisfaction.

Just under half the sample reported concerning levels of burnout.

Working in a high-risk area, such as the ICU, emergency department, or a COVID unit, was associated with higher burnout.

Millennials and Gen Z had lower compassion satisfaction and higher emotional exhaustion than other generations.

Peer supporters in the maintenance stage of their careers had the highest compassion satisfaction and lowest reported burnout.

### Significant challenges providing support during the pandemic:

**Workload/time**  
**COVID impact**  
**Personal stressors**

### Key sources for sustaining well-being during the pandemic:

**Social**  
**Emotional**  
**Physical**  
**Occupational**

## The study proposed recommendations for sustaining effective peer support

### Organization

- Invest sufficiently in peer support programs
- Equip select groups with peer support skills and resources
- Develop layers of well-being programming and support

### Team

- Offer resources and recognition
- Advocate for healthcare professional needs
- Recruit peer supporters
- Track relevant metrics
- Determine training needs and develop new training

### Individual

- Assess and recognize individual peer supporter well-being
- Encourage healthy boundaries
- Provide instrumental, emotional, and social support

The study shows that despite having moderate to high levels of compassion satisfaction, peer supporters reported high levels of burnout and numerous challenges and needs to help them sustain their well-being. Healthcare organizations must continue to study and support the well-being of professional peer supporters to maintain effective peer support programs through an ongoing pandemic.

To learn more about this study, visit: [https://www.jointcommissionjournal.com/article/S1553-7250\(22\)00083-6/fulltext](https://www.jointcommissionjournal.com/article/S1553-7250(22)00083-6/fulltext)