



NEWS RELEASE

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Peer supporters at risk for emotional exhaustion during COVID-19 pandemic

Study in September 2022 issue of The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Illinois, August 23, 2022) – Peer support is an effective, well-received approach for healthcare professional colleagues who face stress, challenges, and reduced well-being. A new study in the September 2022 issue of *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety*, “[The Well-Being of Peer Supporters in a Pandemic: A Mixed-Methods Study](#),” suggests that peer supporters may be at risk for emotional exhaustion due to their increased role and involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Researchers conducted surveys among peer supporters from five well-established peer support programs across the United States – ChristianaCare, MedStar Health, Nationwide Children’s Hospital, University of Missouri Health Care and Johns Hopkins University – to assess secondary traumatic stress, compassion satisfaction (the pleasure derived from helping others) and burnout during the pandemic. Differences in well-being outcomes were analyzed by role, age, years in healthcare, and unit areas. Additionally, qualitative content analysis was performed for open-response questions.

A total of 375 peer supporters completed the survey between spring and summer 2021. Findings showed most participants recorded low secondary traumatic stress and moderate to high compassion satisfaction; nearly 44% reported concerning levels of emotional exhaustion. Compassion satisfaction scored significantly lower and emotional exhaustion significantly higher among the youngest cohort of millennials and Gen Z; and both compassion satisfaction and emotional exhaustion differed across career stages. Emotional exhaustion was significantly higher in peer supporters working in COVID units than in non-COVID units.

The study proposes that maintaining effective peer support programs during an ongoing pandemic requires healthcare organizations to study and support the well-being of peer supporters. Recommendations to sustain effective peer support programs include:

- Investing in peer support programs
- Equipping select groups with basic peer support skills and resources
- Recruiting new peer supporters to maintain capacity and engagement
- Advocating for healthcare professional needs

“Many organizations have created formal peer support programs to provide clinicians in distress access to timely, psychologically safe and low-stigma support from colleagues,” notes an [accompanying editorial](#) by Tait Shanafelt, MD, and Christy Sandborg, MD. “For such programs to be sustainable, it is essential that we care for the peer supporters who provide assistance to colleagues in need.”

Also featured in the September issue:

- [Development and Validation of a Brief Culture-of-Safety Survey](#) (Northwestern Medicine, Chicago)
- [Equity, Where Art Thou? Opportunities to Improve Safety Culture Measurement](#) (editorial)
- [Positive Outcomes in a Virtual Partial Hospitalization Program](#) (Northwell Health’s Zucker Hillside Hospital, Glen Oaks, New York)
- [Outcomes of Anesthesiologist-Led Care of Patients Following Liver Transplantation During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, New York)
- [Implementing a Toolkit to Improve the Education of Patients on Home-Based Outpatient Parenteral Antimicrobial Therapy \(OPAT\)](#) (Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore)
- [Pandemic Preparedness: COVID-19 Lessons Learned in New York’s Hospitals](#) (open access commentary)
- [Factors Associated with Malpractice Claim Payout: An Analysis of Closed Emergency Department Claims](#) (research letter)

For more information, visit [The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety website](#).

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Note for editors

The article is “[The Well-Being of Peer Supporters in a Pandemic: A Mixed-Methods Study](#),” by Kathryn M. Godfrey, PhD; Brandon Kozar, PsyD, MBA; Crystal Morales, MS, BSN, RN; and Susan D. Scott, PhD, RN, CPPS, FAAN. The article appears in *The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety*, volume 48, number 9 (September 2022), published by Elsevier.

The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety

[The Joint Commission Journal on Quality and Patient Safety](#) (JQPS) is a peer-reviewed journal providing healthcare professionals with innovative thinking, strategies and practices in improving quality and safety in healthcare. JQPS is the official journal of [The Joint Commission](#) and [Joint Commission Resources, Inc.](#) Original case studies, program or project reports, reports of new methodologies or the new application of methodologies, research studies, and commentaries on issues and practices are all considered.