Preferences, perceptions and experiences of peer support: A national survey of Australian adults with diabetes

Background
Peer support is the help, assistance and encouragement that people with lived experience of a condition (e.g. diabetes) can offer to one another.

Randomised controlled trials of peer support programs for people with diabetes have demonstrated improvements in:
- behavioural outcomes, e.g. self-management,
- psychosocial outcomes, e.g. emotional well-being,
- health outcomes, e.g. HbA1c.

Effective diabetes peer support program planning and delivery has been limited by a lack of Australian data about what people want, need, and access.

We addressed this gap by conducting a national online survey about diabetes peer support.

Aim
To explore the perceptions and experiences of, and preferences for, peer support amongst Australian adults with type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

Method
Design
A national online survey of Australian adults with diabetes.
Eligibility criteria: type 1 or type 2 diabetes, aged 18-75 years.

Recruitment and Data Collection
A study invitation was mailed to a random sample of 20,000 National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) registrants, stratified as follows:
- 40% with type 1 diabetes,
- 30% with insulin-treated type 2 diabetes,
- 30% with non-insulin-treated type 2 diabetes.

The study was also advertised nationwide in diabetes-related media (e.g. social media pages) and through email distribution lists.

Study invitation and advertisements directed people to the survey URL.

Results
Sample Characteristics
2,342 eligible respondents
- 46% (n=1078) had type 1 diabetes:
  - 56% women,
  - mean±SD age: 44±15 years,
  - 35% using insulin pump.
- 54% (n=1263) of respondents had type 2 diabetes:
  - 43% women,
  - mean±SD age: 61±18 years,
  - 42% insulin-using.

Participation and Preferences
Only 11% (n=244) of respondents were currently participating in diabetes peer support (Figure 1).

9% (n=167) had participated in the past.
38% (n=178) wanted to participate in the future.

Respondents with type 1 diabetes had more likely than those with type 2 diabetes to be participating or interested in future participation (both p<0.001).
Respondents with type 1 diabetes most commonly accessed peer support online (51%).
Respondents with type 2 diabetes most commonly accessed face-to-face support groups (44%).

However, the preferences across diabetes types, genders and ages was for online support.

Peer Support Experiences and Impact
Of those who were participating in peer support:
- 65% were satisfied with their peer support experiences.
- 64% enjoyed their diabetes peer support experiences.
- over two thirds found diabetes peer support helpful for each of the following:
  - their emotional well-being (69%)
  - their self-management (66%)
  - connecting with healthcare services/resources (67%).

Perceived social support was assessed using the 12-item Diabetes Support Scale (DSS, possible score range 1-7).

Those who were participating in peer support reported significantly greater perceived social support compared to those who were not (Figure 3).
- type 1: F(1, 1133)=32.90, p<0.01
- type 2: F(1, 1133)=44.39, p<0.01

Reasons for Non-Participation
- Among respondents who had previously participated in peer support, the main reasons for non-participation were: being too busy (type 1 diabetes: 21%) and preferring to manage diabetes on their own (type 2 diabetes: 22%).
- Among respondents who had not previously participated, the most common reason for non-participation (for both diabetes types) was the perception that there were no programs relevant to their diabetes type (collectively 27%).

Health Professional Endorsement
Around one third of respondents had never discussed their peer support participation with their diabetes health professional(s).
8% reported that their diabetes health professional(s) were unsupportive of their participation (Figure 4).

Conclusions
- These findings provide a road map for how to develop and deliver diabetes peer support in Australia.

We recommend:
- providing more online peer support
  - increasing engagement among people with type 2 diabetes
  - improving awareness about and reach of existing programs
  - improving awareness/understanding of peer support among health professionals.

References

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