PROJECT INFORMATION

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Does a Peer-Led Program with Wellness Coaching Improve Wellness among People with Serious Mental Illness?

Principal investigator

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Organization

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What was the research about?

People with serious mental illness, or SMI, such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia often also have long-term physical health problems. Mental health centers may be able to help people with SMI get wellness services and improve their health.

In this study, the research team looked at whether a peer-led program with wellness coaching helped people with SMI improve their physical and mental health. The six-month program included three months of biweekly group classes. Classes focused on topics such as ways to take charge of one's own health. Patients also received wellness coaching at the same time as the classes and for three months afterward.

The research team compared the program with usual care at a mental health center. Usual care included health screenings, access to mental and physical health services in one place, help managing care from nurses, and peer support.

What were the results?

Compared with people receiving usual care, people in the peer-led program

- Had fewer visits to the emergency room for mental health problems
- Drank less alcohol
- Had better general wellness, such as emotional and financial wellness

- Gave more input to doctors about their care
- Were more satisfied with their care

People in the peer-led program and those who received usual care didn't differ in other ways, such as joining in social activities or having better mobility.

Who was in the study?

The study included 74 people with SMI whose health had recently gotten worse. All people in the study received care at a mental health center in Connecticut. Of these, 46 percent were black, 36 percent were white, 4 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native, 4 percent were more than one race, and 10 percent were another race. The average age was 49, and 64 percent were men.

What did the research team do?

The research team enrolled 37 people in the peer-led program. The team compared people in the program with 37 people receiving usual care at the center. People in both groups were similar in age, gender, and mental and physical health.

People in both groups completed a survey at the beginning of the study and six months later. The survey asked about wellness and satisfaction with care. The research team also looked at people's health records.

People with SMI, family members, and healthcare providers worked as part of the research team during the study.

What were the limits of the study?

The number of people in the study was small. Of the 74 people, 24 didn't finish the surveys. Also, some people's health records didn't include all data needed for the study. Results may differ if more people finished the surveys or if the data were complete. The research team didn't assign people by chance to receive peer-led support or usual care. People in the program may have been different from patients who

received usual care in ways that the research team doesn't know.

Future research could test the peer-led program with more people.

How can people use the results?

Health clinics can use the results of the study when looking for ways to help improve health for people with SMI.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Bellamy179.