A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer-based interventions to maintain and improve offender health in prison settings


Record Status
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Citation

Authors' objectives
The study aimed to synthesise the evidence on peer-based interventions in prison settings by carrying out a systematic review and holding an expert symposium. Review questions were (1) what are the effects of peer-based interventions on prisoner health and the determinants of prisoner health?, (2) what are the positive and negative impacts on health services within prison settings of delivering peer-based interventions?, (3) how do the effects of peer-based approaches compare with those of professionally led approaches? and (4) what are the costs and cost-effectiveness of peer-based interventions in prison settings?

Authors' conclusions
There is consistent evidence from a large number of studies that being a peer worker is associated with positive health. Peer support services can also provide an acceptable source of help within the prison environment and can have a positive effect on recipients. This was confirmed by expert evidence. Research into cost-effectiveness is sparse but a limited HIV-specific economic model, although based on a number of assumptions and evidence of variable quality, showed that peer interventions were cost-effective compared with professionally led interventions. Well-designed intervention studies are needed to provide robust evidence including assessing outcomes for the target population, economic analysis of cost-effectiveness and impacts on prison health services. More research is needed to examine issues of reach, utilisation and acceptability from the perspective of recipients and those who choose not to receive peer support.

Final publication URL
http://www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk/hsdr/hsdr02350/#/abstract

URL for DARE abstract
http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/CRDWeb/ShowRecord.asp?AccessionNumber=12014061266

Indexing Status
Subject indexing assigned by CRD

MeSH
Humans; Prisons; Prisoners; Criminals

Language Published
English

Country of organisation
England

English summary
An English language summary is available.
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AccessionNumber
32014001227

Date abstract record published
27/10/2014