New ways of working in mental health services: a qualitative, comparative case study assessing and informing the emergence of new peer worker roles in mental health services in England

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Citation

Authors' objectives
In this study we aimed to test the international evidence base, and what is known generally about role adoption in public services, in a range of mental health services in England. We also aimed to develop organisational learning supporting the introduction of peer worker roles, identifying learning that was generic across mental health services and that which was specific to organisational contexts or service delivery settings.

Authors' conclusions
Key barriers to, and facilitators of, peer worker role adoption were identified, including valuing the differential knowledge and practice that peer workers brought to the role (especially around maintaining personally, rather than professionally defined boundaries); maintaining peer identity in a role of work; changing organisational structures to support peer workers to remain well in their work; and challenging organisational cultures to empower peer workers to use their lived experience. Recommendations for future research include developing a theoretical framework articulating the change mechanisms underpinning 'what peer workers do', piloting and formally evaluating the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of peer worker interventions, and mixed-method research to better understand the impact of working as a peer worker.

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