

SPECIALIST PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

ROLE DEFINITIONS AND SUPPORT STRUCTURES

PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH PEER SUPPORT WORKER

INTRODUCTION

Peer support workers bring a unique set of skills to perinatal mental health services. Having experienced adversity themselves, they can offer support, hope and encouragement to others in a similar situation¹. They will have an equal relationship with the person they are supporting, based on similar life experiences².

While many models of peer support exist, the underlying principles are universal and should include that perinatal peer support is (i) safe and nurturing; (ii) accessible and inclusive; (iii) complementary to the work of clinical perinatal mental health services; (iv) able to provide opportunities for meaningful involvement of people with lived experience; and (v) beneficial to everyone involved, including peer support workers themselves³.

In order to provide effective support and to safeguard their own health, the Scottish Government report on perinatal mental health peer support⁴ recommends that workers should (i) have robust and ongoing training; (ii) have appropriate and timely clinical supervision; (iii) have support for ongoing good practice; (iv) have support and flexibility in their roles to enable them to maintain their own recovery and wellbeing; (v) not replace clinical staff or be asked to do their work; and (vi) have clear boundaries to their working roles.

All perinatal mental health peer support workers will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes commensurate with the **INFORMED** or **SKILLED** level of the Perinatal Mental Health Curricular Framework⁵, depending on their seniority and training.

Note: The descriptors below are relevant to perinatal peer workers working in specialist MBU or community perinatal mental health teams (whether stand-alone, dispersed or regional). They are not intended to replicate a full job description for individual posts. They should be seen as identifying the roles, responsibilities and supervisory requirements which are core to the delivery of specialist perinatal peer support.

SUMMARY OF ROLE

The Perinatal Mental Health Peer Support Worker has a core role in providing expertise by experience of perinatal mental illness as part of specialist multi-disciplinary perinatal mental health provision in MBU or community settings. Peer support workers can help reduce

¹ Jones CCG et al (2014) The impact of peer support in the context of perinatal mental illness: a meta-ethnography. *Midwifery*, 30(5), 491-8.

² Mead S & McNeil C (2006) Peer support: what makes it unique? *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, 10, 29-37.

³ MMHA, McPin Foundation & Mind (2019) [Five Principles of Perinatal Peer Support](#).

⁴ Moran (2020) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/peer-support-perinatal-mental-health-review-evidence-provision-scotland-internship-project-report/>

⁵ NES (2019) [Perinatal Mental Health Curricular Framework: A framework for maternal and infant mental health](#).

social isolation and improve self-esteem and parenting self-efficacy for new mothers. They can help reduce depressive symptoms and counter stigma by instilling an expectation and hope of recovery for women and their families affected by perinatal mental illness.

Peer workers can contribute to care planning and care delivery, in individual or group settings. They will bring a knowledge of local resources to improve social engagement and be able to use their own lived experience to facilitate a recovery-focussed approach to managing maternal mental ill health. They can have a unique role in empowering women and their families to become experts in their own recovery.

EXPERT ROLES OF THE PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT WORKER

A. Engagement with women and families

- a. Use their own lived experience to support women and their families in their recovery and in their new role as parents, promoting wellbeing and empowering women to make informed decisions about their care
- b. Assist other staff members to identify recovery-focussed interventions, lending their unique insight into mental ill health and what makes recovery possible
- c. Support women to be active participants in care planning and including mindful activities in both care plans and reviews
- d. Employ a recovery-focussed approach to assist women to identify their own personal skills and strengths
- e. Facilitate peer support groups and individual work with women, their infants, partners and other family members where appropriate
- f. Support women and families to identify and engage with local supports which assist their recovery
- g. Contribute to multidisciplinary team, and other related, meetings where appropriate and in collaboration with the woman's perinatal key worker

B. Leadership

- a. Act as an expert resource, based on lived experience, for other professionals involved in the care of women who experience perinatal mental ill health
- b. Contribute to the development and delivery of perinatal mental health education and training for staff working with women, their infants and families, affected by perinatal mental ill health
- c. Work in partnership with local primary care, health visiting, maternity and third sector professionals involved in the care of pregnant and postnatal women, their infants and families

C. Person specific attributes

- a. Be friendly, welcoming and approachable in interactions with women, their families and other professionals

- b. Be able to use their lived experience to support women and families, while recognising and respecting the woman's own lived experience and parenting style, including differences in culture and background
- c. Develop and maintain knowledge and skills in maternal and infant mental health, including child and adult protection
- d. Demonstrate an enthusiasm and commitment to enhancing the care of women who experience perinatal mental ill health, their infants and families

SUPPORT AND SUPERVISORY ARRANGEMENTS

- a) The PMH peer worker should receive induction and ongoing training in perinatal mental health (including mental health first aid, suicide prevention training and child and adult safeguarding) and in the responsibilities of their role. This should include bespoke training at SQA Level 7 of the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) delivered via an appropriate training provider, or equivalent.
- b) As part of induction, there should be a clear shared vision of the role of the peer worker within the team, by the worker and the wider team. The peer worker should feel valued as an integrated member of the team.
- c) The PMH peer worker should receive regular, structured support and supervision from a senior clinical colleague within the service, who has the necessary skills and experience
- d) The PMH peer worker should be receive mentoring through local NHS and/or third sector peer support structures
- e) Supervisory and mentoring arrangements must include support for the mental health and wellbeing needs of the peer worker
- f) The PMH peer worker should have continuing professional development of perinatal mental health skills and knowledge. Opportunities should include attendance at local/regional/national educational meetings and regular meetings with peers working in similar roles in Scotland.