



## Peer Support Program FAQs



Faculté de médecine  
Programme de promotion  
de la santé à la Faculté

Faculty of Medicine  
Faculty Wellness Program

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### 1) What is the rationale for the peer support program?

Literature shows that even physicians with robust personal support networks benefit tremendously from sharing their experiences with peers who have been in a similar situation and can truly understand and empathize with the pain, stress, vulnerability and fear that are common emotional responses to our work.

In response, a number of physician leaders from The Ottawa Hospital, PGME and the Faculty of Medicine Wellness Program have collaborated to roll out a 1:1 pilot peer support program. This program started January 07, 2021 and is available to all Ottawa Hospital staff physicians and uOttawa resident physicians.

We are modeling our peer support program on one put in place by [Dr. Jo Shapiro at Harvard](#), which has demonstrated benefits for their medical staff and has been adopted in health care organizations across North America.

### 2) Why have I been contacted to receive peer support?

The Peer Support Program uses a “reach-out” model to extend an offer of support to any and all TOH physicians or uOttawa residents who have experienced a recent and significant stressful event including: adverse patient outcome, a medical error, patient complaint, or a complex or traumatic code.

We use this “reach-out” model because we know that while physicians value and benefit from peer-support after adverse or other emotionally stressful events they rarely access available formal supports.

### 3) What is the goal of peer support?

Peer support is not therapy or counselling. Instead peer support offers a safe way for physicians impacted by events to talk about their experience and emotions with someone who has empathy from having “been there.” While we are not fixing a clinician’s problems, we offer both support as well as strategies that have helped other clinicians in similar situations. We know that this can help the physician to feel supported, process the event and if needed get information on other resources.



#### 4) How are peer supporters selected and how are they trained?

We asked Department Heads and the Program Directors to nominate staff members and residents who were experienced physicians who would have the skills appropriate for this role.

Peer support nominees attended a half-day interactive training session and have had follow up meetings to solidify their learnings. There will be ongoing opportunities for them to continue to develop their peer support skills. This is a volunteer role. Peer supporters have committed to spending time to be peer supporters and we have created a community of practice to “support the peer supporters” and have meetings with the entire group reviewing different peer support scenarios.

#### 5) How does a peer support session work?

After an initial email contact, you will decide with your peer supporter a convenient time to meet should you choose to. Ensure that you pick a time during which you can dedicate 30 minutes to have an open and non-rushed discussion. Most sessions are completed within 30 minutes. This reach out session is meant as a check in and is not treatment.

#### 6) What about confidentiality?

The peer support process is completely confidential and there is no feedback to the Department or Division you work in. There are no records kept from the conversation.

#### 7) What do we do if you and your peer supporter feel that you may need some additional support or professional help or if there are concerns that you may be at risk of harming yourself or others?

If you are experiencing significant symptoms such as sleeplessness, we encourage you to contact – and we provide connections to – additional supports and resources. The peer support program is not a medical assessment.

While we are strongly committed to confidentiality, we must break that confidentiality if you are at risk of harming yourself or others.

#### 8) Am I required to participate in peer support program?

No - the peer support program is completely optional. We hope that most members of the medical staff will take advantage of the opportunity to try peer support, but participation is not required and is completely optional.

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### 9) Can I choose a peer supporter?

We have 30 resident and staff physician peer supporters. If you are uncomfortable with the name given to you, please let us know and we will match you with another peer supporter. We want those participating to feel they would be able to have an open discussion with the peer supporter.

### 10) How can I get more information about the TOH peer support program?

For any other information or questions please don't hesitate to reach out to anyone of us on the core team.

**TOH : Dr Kathleen Gartke & Dr. Nathalie Fleming**

**PGME: Dr Loree Boyle, Dr Lisa Thurgur, Dr Claudia Gomez**

**Faculty Wellness Office: Dr Liz Muggah**

*Adapted with permission from CHEO Peer Support Program FAQ (2020)*

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