

Also see abstract/ poster ID 672 for the patient-participants' perspective

The use of a lay health worker intervention to improve uptake of pulmonary rehabilitation in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease: a focus group and questionnaire study.

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Introduction

Referral to pulmonary rehabilitation (PR) is a target in the NHS Quality and Outcomes Framework in primary care, and referrals are rising. PR is the most effective treatment for the symptoms of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), however the impact of PR is restricted by poor rates of uptake and completion.

Community Health Workers or Lay Health Workers (LHWs) are common in lowincome countries. (1, 2) Use of peer supporters within the NHS is becoming more widespread as a strategy to enhance patient outcomes, particularly in the context of chronic disease management such as diabetes and mental health. (3)

IMPROVE is testing a behaviour change intervention to promote uptake and completion of PR, delivered by volunteer LHWs (called PR-buddies), in a multicentre cluster randomised controlled trial.

Objective: this study explores the acceptability of the training and the PR-buddy role to volunteer PR-buddies using focus groups and a postal questionnaire.

Methods

84 PR-buddies were recruited, trained and managed by trained PR staff in 14 intervention sites. Training materials were provided by the IMPROVE research team. PR-buddy training included communication skills, role boundaries, confidentiality and selected behaviour change techniques.

Eight focus groups were held with 41 trained PR-buddies.

Postal questionnaires, which included a free text box, enabled more PRbuddies to provide feedback.

3

Results: PR-buddy focus groups

Focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for coding and inductive thematic analysis

Motivations for becoming a PR-buddy

...the idea of helping

someone to go for it

because we all know

will feel better, it was

that if they do, they

just a no-brainer. "?"

The PR-buddies' strong belief in PR and their desire to help others with the same condition motivated them to volunteer

> Views about training received

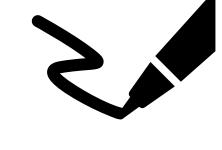
The training helped their understanding of the role and its boundaries, However, they felt it was not always realistic for 'real-world' settings. They believed that their experiences were key in helping them support patients

Results: PR-buddy postal questionnaires

72 sent, 53 replies (73.6% response rate)

	Average score	Response option (lowest and highest)	
How confident were you in your ability to support patients using what you learnt and what you understood during the training?	5.5	1 = Not at all	6 = Completely confident
Overall, were you satisfied with the training and support for PR-Buddies?	5.7	1 = Very dissatisfied	6 = Very satisfied
How motivated did you feel about being a PR-Buddy when you were supporting patients?	5.4	1 = Not at all	6 = Extremely motivated
How much effort was involved in being a PR-Buddy? Note: reverse scoring	4.7	1 = A lot of effort	6 = No effort
How acceptable to you was the amount of <u>your time</u> your role as a PR-Buddy took?	5.6	1 = Not Acceptable	6 = Completely acceptable

5.2



The best part of the experience of the trial for me was meeting other buddies. The trial started well with the training but was too slow in pairing up PR-buddies with clients.

1 = Not very

helpful

6 = Very helpful

I feel that [the] buddy support role should be continued as it seems to get through to those who are unsure the PR course is worthwhile.

...I was eager to support others during their time doing the rehab course. The training was excellent.

More roleplay in the course would be helpful.

66 I was quite confident with the training that I was ready and have the first phone call "

"Gives me a bit of purpose in lifeso it's beneficial in a number of ways, both for me and also for other people. "?"

Personal impact of bring a PRbuddy

The role of being a PR-buddy was rewarding and it improved their self-confidence. It also helped them connect and feel less socially isolated

Overall, how helpful did you think the IMPROVE

research was for patients who got PR-Buddy support?

Discussion and conclusions

There was a strong motivation to support others, enthusiasm for PR and loyalty to PR staff which encouraged people living with COPD to volunteer as PR-buddies.

The PRB role was acceptable to the buddies and they were mostly satisfied with the training received.

The training was important to boost their confidence and prepare the volunteers to support patients.

Using a train-the-trainer model of training PR staff to recruit and train PR-buddies enabled efficient dissemination of the training and set-up of the PR-buddy services across 14 intervention sites. One PR service dropped out after PR staff training due to staff having insufficient time to carry on with the trial.

References

^{1,} Perry HB. A Comprehensive Description of Three National Community Health Worker Programs and Their Contributions to Maternal and Child Health and Primary Health Care: Case Studies from Latin America (Brazil), Africa (Ethiopia) and Asia (Nepal). 2016. (https://chwcentral.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/01/Perry-CHW-Programs-in-Brazil-Ethiopia-and-Nepal-2016.pdf). Accessed 30 August 2025.

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