

## **Peer Support at BIDMC**

### **Why did we start a Peer Support program at BIDMC?**

Over the last decade, there has been a growing body of literature describing the experiences health care workers face when they are part of or witness an adverse event or other upsetting situation. Sometimes, impacted health care workers in these situations are described as “second victims,” because these are challenging events to deal with, especially alone. Often, those who can be most supportive in these circumstances are peers. A Steering Committee has come together to help create an environment that emphasizes peer support as part of its broader culture of patient safety and just culture. We recognize that our clinicians and staff are human beings, and that they need support to be successful in their work. In 2012 a Faculty Hour group did some benchmarking research about Peer Support programs, with the goal of implementing one at BIDMC to better help our staff through the difficult situations that will inevitably present themselves in a hospital setting. BIDMC also adopted the Communication, Apology, and Resolution approach to adverse events, and as part of the emphasis on empathy and support in this approach, it was clear that a provider support program was needed.

### **What has the Peer Support Steering Committee done to date?**

The Steering Committee was formed in January 2013 and includes representatives from the medical and nursing staff, patient safety, psychiatry, social work, human resources, and others. This team developed BIDMC’s program as it stands today, defining the role of the Peer Supporter, selecting the formal training resources, designing nomination procedures, scoping the rollout, and presenting the program to a variety of groups across the medical center. After the program was piloted in several areas of the hospital, the Steering Committee decided that it would be beneficial to develop our own formal training for Peer Supporters to emphasize BIDMC’s culture and commitment, which is essential to the success of the program. Steering team members have led two trainings to date, for 48 Peer Supporters. The Steering Committee also tracks usage of the program over time, and holds bi-annual meetings and monthly check-ins for all active supporters to ensure that they feel the organization is behind them.

### **What does a Peer Supporter do?**

Peer Supporters are nominated by their colleagues through anonymous surveys. If the nomination is accepted, the Peer Supporter is then formally trained in the skills necessary to offer formal support to his or her colleagues in upsetting situations, such as adverse events. A Peer Supporter helps colleagues by: listening, normalizing feelings, validating competency, discussing need for time away from work and/or need for additional resources, and directing peer to additional resources. It is **not** within a Peer Supporter's role to participate in any QI analysis, offer disclosure coaching, deal with job performance issues, or counsel colleagues regarding substance abuse or mental health issues.

### **Who are the Peer Supporters?**

Peer Supporters are attendings, fellows, residents, nurses, and techs that have been nominated by their peers for this role. There are currently 80 Peer Supporters, and they are located in Labor and Delivery, the Operating Rooms/PACUs, Critical Care, the Emergency Department, and nearly all Med/Surg units.