

THE SEVERN SCHOOL OF PSYCHIATRY BUDDY SCHEME

An informal peer support network for new psychiatry core trainees.

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AIMS & OBJECTIVES

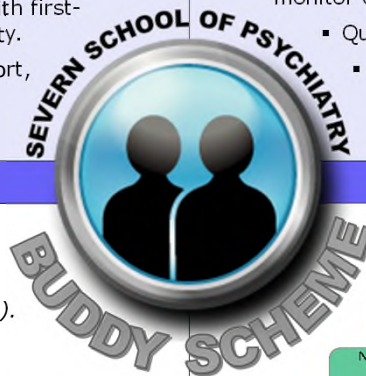
- The co-authors recognised a need for better peer support for newly appointed core trainees in the Severn School of Psychiatry.
- The main objective was to facilitate an informal support scheme between new and existing trainees for the duration of training, to ascertain whether pairing newly appointed core and existing advanced trainees had the potential to address this unmet need.
- The aims were to:
 - Design, launch and evaluate a 9-month 'Pilot Buddy Scheme' initiative between Dec 2012-July 2013.
 - Match each core and advanced trainee pair, based upon geography, specialty interest or trainee specific matching requests.
 - Encourage buddies to meet together at a mutually agreed frequency.
 - Understand the reasons and benefits to participants of joining the Buddy Scheme.
 - Identify/solve areas of the pilot scheme requiring improvement, to facilitate running an annual scheme from August 2013 onwards.

BACKGROUND

- In the last decade, the RCPsych has taken urgent steps to address the specialty's recruitment problem.
- The author's believe that the poor retention of psychiatric trainees is a problem that has been somewhat overlooked in recent years.
- The Severn School of Psychiatry recruits approximately 20 new core psychiatry trainees each year.
- Severn School spans a wide area, with many trainees new to the region as well as the specialty.
- No recognised peer support existed to assist core trainees with settling into the psychiatry training scheme.
- In our training we had welcomed input from those with first-hand experience of the challenges within this specialty.
- Having personally recognised the value of peer support, we felt that a buddy scheme may be a suitable way of meeting this previously unmet need.

METHODS

- A formal accountability and scheme structure (see Fig 1) was developed to give clear guidance, and senior/confidential support for participants. This was agreed with the Head of School & TPDs.
- Emails were sent to all new core trainees and existing ST4 trainees inviting them to participate in the pilot scheme.
- Interested trainees indicated matching preferences and were matched, where possible, based on 'Geography' +/- 'Specialty'.
- The scheme was launched in Dec 2012, & participants invited to join focus groups to explore their expectations of the scheme.
- Pre- and post-scheme online questionnaires were conducted to monitor expectations, outcomes and any improvements needed.
 - Questionnaire data was analysed using excel.
 - Free-text and focus group responses were categorised under themes using consensus agreement between authors (LH, AG).



RESULTS

- 7 core and 7 advanced trainees joined the pilot scheme from Dec 2012-July 2013.
- Pre- and post-scheme surveys highlighted reasons for joining and benefits to participants (see Fig 2 & 3).
- 87% of participants indicated a wish to continue on the scheme the following year.
- Those who left the scheme did so as a result of career change or geographical relocation.
- Qualitative feedback provided further detail regarding the experiences of participants (see Table 1).
- Following the successful pilot scheme, 14 newly appointed core and 14 additional advanced trainees joined the August 2013/14 scheme.

RESULTS

Fig 1: Formal accountability structure

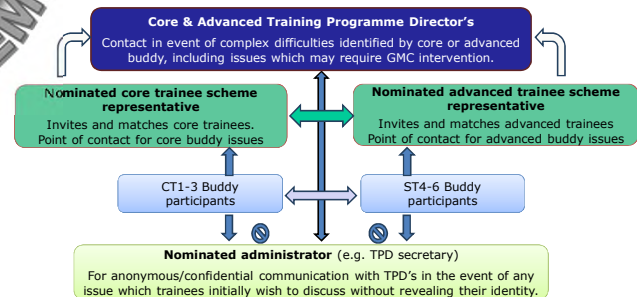


Fig 2: Reasons for trainees joining

Fig 3: Benefits from participation

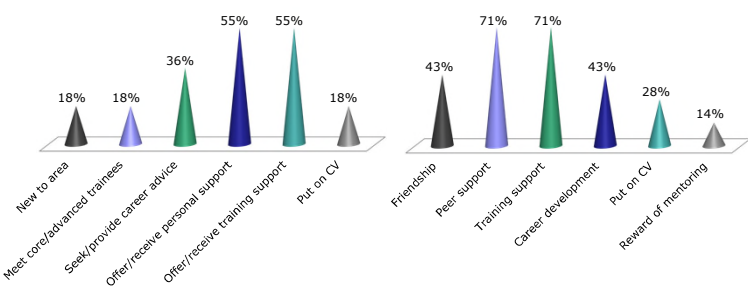


Table 2: Qualitative feedback from participants

Advanced (ST4) Buddy Feedback	<i>'My experience has been very positive. We [met] on a fairly informal basis...away from clinical sites...this has been helpful in allowing [the trainee] to open up more than if we had met at work. We discussed a whole range of issues... not only...training and work. I found this a useful experience of supervision and mentoring. It has been lovely to get to know a new trainee and remind myself what it was like at the start of training.'</i>
Core (CT1) Buddy Feedback	<i>'Helpful to look at training requirements such as WPBAs, e-portfolio and ARCP with someone who has done these recently...additional benefit of support from someone much closer to my training level...'</i> <i>'... [My buddy] has been able to offer non-clinical opportunities...which might lead to posters, publications etc...for which I am very grateful...'</i>

CONCLUSION

- The Buddy Scheme has successfully provided professional and personal benefits to scheme participants, including informal peer support for newly appointed core trainees, mentoring opportunities for advanced trainees and friendship for both.
- A scheme of this nature enables core trainees to develop awareness of training opportunities and provides emotional support at an important stage of training. For advanced trainees it provides developmental opportunities and a model that will continue when they become a consultant.
- To further develop the scheme we would like to equip, resource and train advanced trainees with the skills required to effectively mentor and coach their core trainees as suggested by the RCPsych.
- We hope that there may be benefits in recruitment and retention from the deployment of the scheme.
- This model could be easily set up in any training specialty by approaching Heads of School and Training Programme Directors to both support the scheme and provide accountability when required.