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Emotional First Aid:
HEAR and Peer Support Programs

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The pandemic has exacerbated workplace stress felt by everyone involved either directly or indirectly with health care delivery.

Earlier this year, in response to the emergence of the pandemic, The Healer Education Assessment Referral (HEAR) Program members Drs. Judy Davidson, Sidney Zisook and Clinical Nurse Specialist, Jim Kane launched a Peer Support, Emotional First Aid Program at UCSDH. The goal of the We CARE (Compassion, Acceptance, Resilience and Empathy) Peer Supporter Program was to rapidly educate volunteer staff to provide one-on-one peer support to address the stress and emotions associated with the pandemic. The Peer Support program, was modelled after an emotional first-aider program created at the University of Missouri[1-3], replicated widely across the United States, and previously piloted at UCSD.[4] The HEAR team collaborated with consultant Dr. Timothy McDonald to create a 13 hour program, one

hour a week for 13 weeks. Guest faculty were recruited who were specialists in topics such as grief, depression, resiliency, mindfulness, emotional first aid, empathic communication, and recognizing colleagues who would benefit from referral to therapy. Dr. McDonald recruited actors who were out of work during the pandemic to create a series of simulations to be used as springboards for discussion during the interactive workshops. Each 6–7 minute video portrayed Peer Supporters in action with a variety of situations. Break out rooms were used for intimate discussions between participants about the case, communication, and skills used to navigate the situation. Program participants included a range of healthcare professionals including administrative support staff, chaplains, social workers, nurses, therapists and physicians. The program received
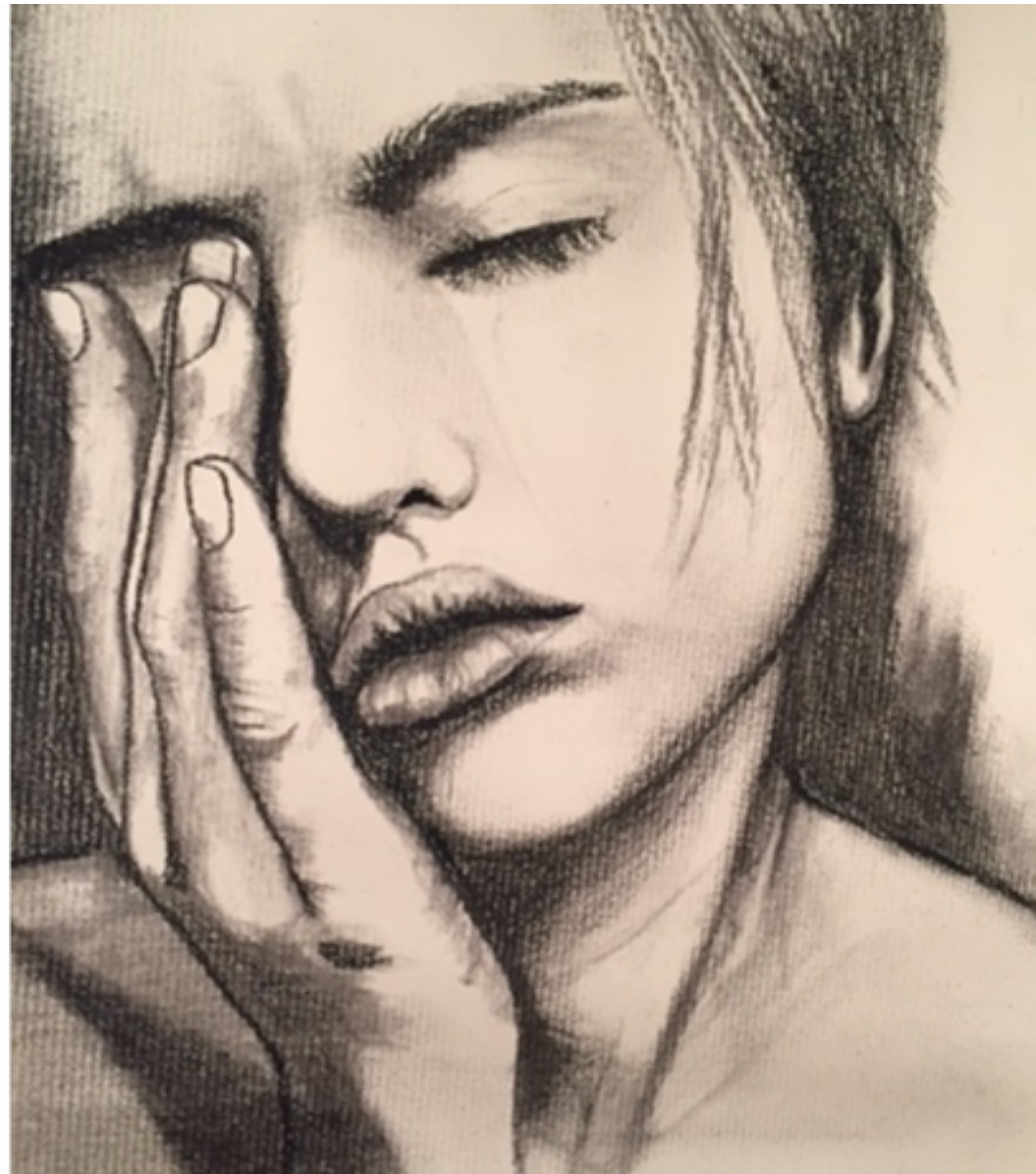
excellent evaluations and will be repeated in the early spring.

Emotional first aid is not new, and has been used for many years to treat the emotional and psychological impact of traumatic events. Use of emotional first aid for healthcare workers during a pandemic is essential as pandemics are known to increase anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts in essential workers.[5-8] Emotional or psychological first aid (PFA) is an initial disaster response intervention with the goal to promote safety, stabilize survivors of disasters and

connect individuals to help and resources. The purpose of the PFA provided by the Peer Support Program is to assess the immediate concerns, needs of an individual during or following times of trauma and provide connection to prevent risks associated with loneliness.

Similar to how the American Red Cross Psychological First Aid Program aids in building resiliency for support of family, friends and coworkers through crisis, the Peer Support Program offers training to staff to identify, address and manage work-related stress in the moment as it occurs. A secondary goal is to assure that Peer Supporters can recognize those in need of professional help and offer them the information regarding referrals. Since the inception of the program, 258 individuals have attended Peer Support classes. 36 have attended 6 or more classes and will undergo a certification process in January 2021.

In September 2020, a pilot was launched in the Nursing Research and Education Department. An intervention log tied to a QR code was created to support timely documentation of the peer support connections. The intervention log was approved for use by the Risk Management team and deemed appropriate for this pilot. Five Peer Supporters who attended at least six hours of training were included in the pilot. Departmental peers were asked if they had a preference for peer supporter, and the few

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Jim Kane
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has worked with UC San Diego Health for two years, as a Nurse Educator in the Nursing Education department. Jodi earned her Ph.D. from the University of San Diego in 2016, during that time, led multiple community engagement projects for underserved community members. Currently at UCSDH, she co-facilitates the organization's general nursing orientation, has managed the system-wide, Frontline Impact quality improvement program, develops continuing education for UCSDH staff and co-creates equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives. Jodi's specializes in mentoring new and experienced nurses, collaborating with others to implement innovative quality improvement solutions and instructional design.

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ROLE OF THE WE CARE PEER SUPPORTER

- The Peer Supporter is NOT a therapist
- Notice colleagues who are stressed
- Offer a moment to vent or chat
- Guide colleagues through in the moment stress reduction techniques
- Offer support and connection to reduce the risks associated with loneliness
- Recognize when the stress is more than a friend can help with
- Provide information about referral to counselors who can help

preferences submitted were honored. The five peer supporters were assigned eight peers including the three managers of the department. Forty-two interactions were logged as of November with 24 submitted by three peer supporters. Most of the interactions were simple connections to start the program, followed by other categories of support including addressing bullying, and support for home issues. One connection resulted in a referral to a higher level of support. Time spent in peer support encounters ranged from

1–60 minutes with a mean of 16 minutes. This pilot, if successful, may be expanded across the system as the many benefits are still being explored.

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Charcoal

Want to learn more? Now more than ever we're challenged to connect in spite of our differences, the pandemic-related burdens and a need for a more compassionate work environment. For those seeking to become a Peer Supporter, or just learn more, contact Judy Davidson, DNP RN, Nurse Scientist jdavidson@health.ucsd.edu