**NHS Lanarkshire – Hospital Peer Supporters**

**Pulling together to try and make a difference – Staff Care is not just a Buzz Phrase**

The Staff Care and Wellbeing peer supporters Team turned out to be a pretty awesome bunch of people. Ridiculous really when you consider the multiple disciplines involved: mental health nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, Orthoptics and psychologists, all specialists in their own fields but not a clue what was expected of them.

Under the guidance of the Healthcare Chaplains and their expertise we somehow managed to bring a hospital together, when staff were fatigued, emotionally drained, frightened, and overwhelmed at the magnitude of the task they were facing. As peer supporters our role was to have that conversation to allow staff to offload, not to fix their difficulties but to guide them in how to normalise their situation, stabilise and acknowledge their crisis, facilitate understanding of their emotions and nudge them in the correct direction for ideas on effective coping strategies and ways to be kind to themselves to ready them for the next crisis that was surely waiting for them around the next corner. On occasion it was necessary to refer them to someone else as their difficulties exceeded our boundaries and remit.

My most enduring memory of my time as a peer supporter, is when a member of staff who having heard a talk the day before in the lecture theatre sought support after a particularly challenging time in the ward. Due to the restrictions, a patient at the end of their life, could not have family members in the ward and died with the nurse holding them. The team that included students were new to the clinical area and trying to make sense of everything that was happening including death.

Supporting the team was to be expected but the member of staff recognised they also needed support.

The staff member came to the rest centre, high on adrenaline and emotional and needing to talk. In the quiet space that was found, they were able to let go and cry and cry; and to talk about their experience of what is happening. Although a very experienced member of staff these were new experiences and it was difficult and they were struggling.

From this conversation, it helped the staff member with their resilience to enable them to return to the ward and continue to support the staff that included the opportunity to debrief and permission to be emotional.

This is just one of the many stories that I have to tell, it is essential that staff care remain a priority throughout the pandemic and beyond. Staff care is not just the next buzz phrase, it is the be all and end all. Let’s ensure that our staff remain at the forefront of the collective minds of health boards and Government, because let’s face it, where would we be without them.

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Below are some comments received by the Staff Care and Wellbeing individual and group support:

* Thank you so much for coming along today. We all got a lot out of the session. It’s made me think a lot about my own approach when things are challenging.
* Thanks for listening- I really needed that today.
* Take Care- you are all doing a great job of looking after us and I hope you have people looking after you too.

The feedback below is from a member of staff who approached the staff support service:

*“ My Dad passed away in the middle of May and I was really struggling.  At the end of July I contacted the staff support in University Hospital Wishaw and had a face to face consultation with one of the volunteer counsellors.*

*I got great benefit from the consultation and they gave me details of the spiritual care and wellbeing service.*

*I made contact with Emma Thomson who said she could arrange a phone call or video call.  I opted for the phone call. I received 6 appointments over a 6 week period.*

*I got great benefit from the counselling sessions.  It made me aware that everyone’s grieving process is different and you don’t need to cry to be grieving etc. I would advise anyone who is struggling to contact the service”*