Peer Support Workshops:
Peer Support in the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
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Workshop 1: Peer Support in School of Veterinary Studies (10:20)

- Undergraduate students consulted and requested formalised peer support
- Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) with pastoral support developed
- Training for student peers: compliments professional training and helps equip them with skills: tailored to the needs of the curriculum: includes SAMH Safe Talk training (particularly relevant to Vets)
- Launched 12 February 2013
- Dedicated student support room with regular drop-in sessions 2 days per week
- Peer recruitment is open to all 2nd & subsequent years
- Empowering students – trained peers will be involved in developing future training

Peer Support in the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies
Peer Pastoral Support through open drop in sessions offered by well trained peer-supporters.

The veterinary profession has very high depression and suicide rates, so one concern is how to prepare students to cope with this in addition to developing veterinary skills. All students were surveyed to ask about what kinds of support would be helpful and pastoral support (rather than academic support) along with interaction with other years were highlighted as the preferred focus.

In USA pastoral peer support is a fairly common model, Oxford is one of a small number of UK universities that use it, and Liverpool vet school have recently initiated a pilot. Recommended text: “Peer Support in colleges & Universities, a 30 hour intensive training course”, Anne Ford, 2004.

There is a staff member supporting and facilitating the scheme. 31 volunteer students (including a higher proportion of males than in course as a whole) were trained over an intensive 3 day (18 hour) weekend, with 2 further training sessions in January. In this case there was no selection, everyone who volunteered was enlisted, but may need to review this. There is at least one trained peer supported for each Vet house. Training has emphasised topics such as confidentiality; what to do if others become overly reliant on you; self awareness; recognising your own biases, feelings, preferences, ethos. Peer supporters come together periodically with the staff lead but must still keep confidentiality.

The scheme is just going live. Drop in sessions over lunchtimes, twice a week, are advertised each has at least 2 peer supporters available. Vet students dislike disrupting the work of colleagues so it was felt important to provide a venue & environment where asking for support is flagged as being OK.

Lots of the skills developed as part of the peer supporter training are also part of the vet curriculum : Communication; empathy; listening; referral. Means there is potential to embed peer support deeply into the curriculum.