

Enhancing Psychosocial Support for Hospitalised Adolescents: The Value of Livewire's Near-Peer Facilitation Model

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Background/Purpose:

Adolescents with serious or chronic illnesses face significant psychosocial challenges during hospitalisation, including isolation, loss of control, and disrupted development. Eating disorders represent a particularly important area, with increasing presentation rates and rising hospitalisations highlighting the urgent need for innovative support programs. Starlight's Livewire program provides creative peer support across multiple paediatric healthcare settings through a distinctive "near-peer" facilitation model—where young adult creative professionals engage adolescent patients. Existing research and evaluation studies on Livewire have consistently highlighted the unique value of this approach in supporting young people's wellbeing.

Approach:

Livewire operates both in-hospital and online, providing age-appropriate creative activities (art, music, gaming, design) and moderated social connection. The near-peer model employs facilitators who are young adults with creative expertise, positioned developmentally closer to participants than traditional healthcare staff. This presentation draws on multiple evaluation studies, clinician feedback, and practice observations to examine how the near-peer approach enhances program effectiveness and engagement.

Outcomes/Impact:

Evidence demonstrates that near-peer facilitators uniquely support social connection, build self-esteem and self-efficacy, and provide positive distraction from medical experiences. The model facilitates trust and rapport-building, offers developmentally appropriate role models, and complements clinical care without duplicating therapeutic interventions. Young people report feeling understood and

less judged, while clinicians value the specialised engagement skills near-peer facilitators bring to multidisciplinary teams.

Innovation and Significance:

The near-peer facilitation model represents an innovative approach to adolescent psychosocial support in healthcare settings. By leveraging the developmental proximity and creative skills of young adult facilitators, Livewire effectively addresses the unique needs of hospitalised adolescents across diverse diagnostic groups. This practice-based presentation offers insights for implementing similar models to enhance psychosocial care for young people with serious and chronic illness.

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There are no grants or conflicts of interest to declare.