

PEER GROUPS: a new format of continuing professional development for medical professionals in Ukraine

The initiative was implemented during 2020-2022 under the support of the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical Education Development", and since 2021 in partnership with the USAID project "Health reform support in Ukraine"

PEER GROUPS AS A CPD FORMAT

Peer groups are small groups of specialists with equal (peer) positions who meet regularly to critically discuss their personal medical practice and learn from each other experience to improve the quality of care.

Peer groups, as a CPD format for medical professionals, **exist in many countries of Europe, USA, Australia**. In Ukraine, till recently this format was unavailable and was not developed as a CPD option for physicians or nurses.



The **Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development"** started introducing peer groups for physicians, nurses, and healthcare managers of primary health care (PHC) in 2020.

UKRAINIAN-SWISS PROJECT "MEDICAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT"

Duration of the first phase:
December 2018-June 2023

Implemented:

Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute (Swiss TPH)

Financed:

Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Goal of the Project:

To provide quality care to the Ukrainian population by improving the medical education system for the primary healthcare workforce

HIGHLIGHTS

- Introducing the format of peer groups into the CPD available options in Ukraine, including legislative recognition
- Building facilitators' capacities to establish peer groups in the

medical facilities and forming demand for peer groups

- Contributing to the quality improvement of primary health care through the self-managed CPD format which is available at the level of a facility and corresponds to the practical needs of medical professionals

ADVANTAGES OF THE PEER GROUP FORMAT

Among the key advantages of peer groups participants mention:

- Possibility to have access to **timely knowledge and skills upgrading**, based on practical needs (e.g. COVID-19);
- Possibility to study together with colleagues, which helps to **build trust in a team**, and to develop the same level of competencies among all the professionals in a facility;
- **Open and informal atmosphere** of studying. Application of interactive approaches to learning promotes positive inclination to CPD;
- **Convenient time and place for meetings simplifies access to learning**, and regularity fits the need of medical professionals to study during their whole professional life;
- During the meetings of peer groups, participants support each other which helps to **reduce stress and professional burnout**;
- Support the introduction of **learning organization principles** in medical facilities.

It is almost for the first time we are studying those things, which are really important for our practice. I like that we can decide ourselves what topics to discuss during our peer group meetings.



Leonid Melnyk,
family doctor,
Ladyzhynka village,
Cherkasy region

IMPLEMENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEER GROUPS IN UKRAINE

The project started to implement the peer groups scheme for medical professionals with the training of facilitators – those specialists, who initiate the launching of a peer group, organize, and facilitate meetings. After adapting materials developed by Swiss TPH in Tajikistan, the Project developed **a training course for facilitators** (the basic course – 14 training hours, updated in the 2022 course – 26 training hours). The course took place online because of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021. And since then, the format is kept the same.



Renato Galeazzi,
professor, physician,
master trainer of the
course

The master trainer of facilitators was Renato Galeazzi, a physician, professor, and member of the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences, who has many years of experience establishing and participating in peer groups in Switzerland. Among the key topics covered in the training are: peer groups, their advantages, and place in CPD, the role of a facilitator and participants in a group, group dynamics, and facilitation skills. In the second phase of the Project, the training will be placed on the online platform for continuous learning of medical professionals on a bigger scale.

PEER GROUPS IN UKRAINE

Initiative:

Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development"

Start of implementation: Spring 2020

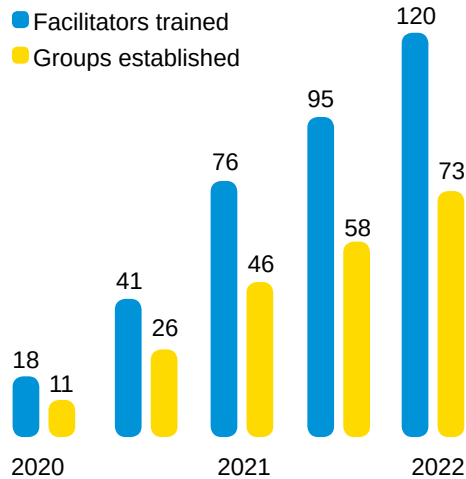
Target group:

physicians, nurses, and managers of PHC

Key implementing partner:

USAID project "Health reform support" extended peer groups in 2021 to secondary and tertiary levels of health care provision

Dynamics of peer groups development

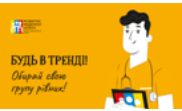


In 2020-2022, the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development" together with the USAID project "Health reform support" conducted six trainings for peer group facilitators.

In total, **120 medical professionals went through the training** and became facilitators of peer groups.

Since 2020, 73 peer groups were established, and 700 representatives of primary, specialized, and emergency care attended the meetings.

Winter - Spring, 2020



Preparation: adapting and developing materials, creating online training for facilitators

Autumn, 2020



First eleven peer groups started working in Ukraine

Spring, 2021



New partnership: USAID project "Health reform support"

Autumn, 2021



The First Congress of Peer Group Facilitators

Winter - Autumn, 2022



The fifth training for peer group facilitators (MED project)

June, 2020



The first training for peer group facilitators (MED project)

Winter, 2021



The second training for peer group facilitators (MED project)

Summer, 2021



The third and fourth training for peer group facilitators (USAID project)

Winter, 2022



50 peer groups are working in Ukraine

Autumn, 2022



The sixth training for peer group facilitators (USAID project)

Due to the participation in peer group meetings, medical professionals gained new knowledge and obtained and practiced new clinical and communication skills, implanted activities, which promote the prevention of professional burnout. Peer group meetings took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and also during the full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine.



KEY ASPECT TO ENSURE PEER GROUPS IMPLEMENTATION AT A FACILITY

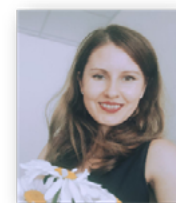
Among the key aspects which ensure successful implementation of peer groups at a facility are the following:

- Support and interest from facility managers in the development of peer groups increase the motivation of staff to learn,
- Defined time in the working schedule of physicians and nurses for peer group meetings promotes enrollment of professionals into a peer group

and ensures proper planning of learning at a facility,

- Establishment of an independent peer group for nurses promotes their self-confidence, and leadership, and increases their professionalism.

This is a unique opportunity to get together, discuss important topics, learn, and immediately implement new things into practice.



Yulia Nechyporuk,
family doctor,
Rivne city

REGIONS, WHERE PEER GROUPS ARE FUNCTIONING

The new initiative rapidly spread geographically shortly after it started. **The first groups were launched in Lviv, Rivne, Chernivtsi, Kharkiv, and Ternopil regions.** After each wave of training for facilitators, new and new locations, where peer groups for medical professionals were taking place, appeared on the map of Ukraine. During 2020-2022, peer groups were functioning in 20 regions of Ukraine.

Because of the full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February 2022, peer groups in Kharkiv, Kherson, Donetsk, and Zaporizhzhya regions partially suspended their activities.

SUPPORT OF FACILITATORS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

For many medical professionals, the introduction of peer groups became a new professional experience. For this, they needed proper facilitation, communication skills, and skills of interaction in a group. Thus, the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development" together with the USAID project "Health reform support" conducted **the First Congress of Peer Group Facilitators in October 2021.** Almost 50 participants shared their experience of peer group establishment, looked for possibilities to improve this education format, and improved their skills of interaction with colleagues within the peer group meetings.

In the Autumn of 2022, the Project organized **a supervisory and mentoring program**, which took place online and lasted for three months. During regular meetings, facilitators of peer groups built further their facilitation competencies through peer and professional supervision. They obtained support to continue the peer group activity under unpredictable circumstances and gained new skills to help colleagues in stressful and emergency situations, which was requested as a response to wartime challenges.



MATERIALS

To ensure the best educational experience for medical professionals in peer group meetings, the project created and regularly updates informational materials for peer group facilitators and participants. The guidelines for facilitators were updated and published. Also, materials such as notebooks, informational booklets, and stickers were made available.



LEGISLATIVE REGULATION

The shift from postgraduate compulsory training every five years to a free choice and CPD-points-based system happened in 2019. This made peer groups relevant and partially recognized by the state. Peer groups are a format of informal education that has been gaining high popularity among medical practitioners. The development and rapid proliferation of peer groups in different regions lead to the necessity to regulate legislatively this approach. In the new version of the CPD decree, which is expected to be approved in the Spring of 2023, peer groups will be defined as a separate CPD format. The attendance of these events will lead to the award of CPD points. To implement the decree into practice, the USAID

project "Health reform support" and the Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development" elaborated methodological recommendations for medical facilities which want to introduce peer groups and enhance the culture of learning organization there.

Due to the peer group, our professionals became more open in communication and discussing clinical cases. We could build trust and now physicians are sharing their doubts, understanding they will not face negative attitudes. Before this it was impossible.



Natalia Tunik,
peer group facilitator,
family doctor,

Novotroitske village,
Kherson region

SUPPORT OF PEER GROUPS BY IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

Key activities:

online training course (5 lectures, 8 interactive sessions), Congress of peer group facilitators, supervisory and mentoring program, and trainings on clinical skills

Materials:

informational and promotional materials, stationery

Other possibilities:

a platform to organize discussions for experience exchange, Book Club, and community building

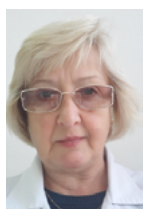
PEER GROUPS BUILD LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTE COMMUNITY

Facilitators of peer groups not only develop and promote this approach, but also start to introduce new joint initiatives, cooperate, and support each other. Thus, in October 2021 the **'Book Club'** of peer group facilitators appeared. Every month 'reading' facilitators meet to discuss a new book and reflect on the reading experience. This club promoted the development of regional book clubs, so now some facilitators manage both a peer group and a book club.

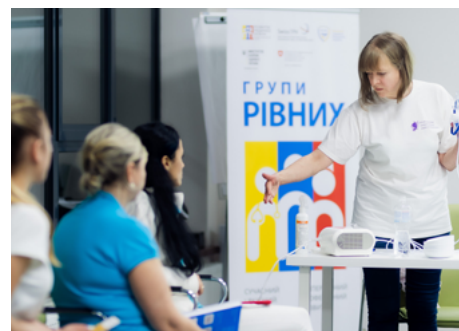
Strong cooperation is growing between peer groups in different regions. In the Cherkasy region, three peer groups formed in Uman, Kaniv, and Zolotonosha. Together they **organize joint meetings and educational events**. Such an experience also exists in Dnipropetrovsk, and Lviv regions.

Additionally, facilitators of peer groups established their online chats and groups where regularly exchange their experience and useful materials.

COVID-19 treatment was an urgent topic to discuss. I am very grateful that we had this opportunity to timely meet at the peer group meeting and discuss this topic and share our knowledge.



Liubov Kostelna,
family doctor,
Chortkiv city,
Ternopil region



PRECONDITIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF PEER GROUPS AS A SELF-MANAGED FORMAT OF CPD IN UKRAINE

Peer groups as a CPD format for medical professionals have a number of advantages in comparison with other formats and proved their effectiveness in many countries. Medical professionals in Ukraine also have interest in and are ready to introduce peer groups: they obtain facilitation skills, organize groups, and regularly conduct meetings.

It is crucial for the further development of peer groups that health care managers understand the importance of learning at the workplace, support the activities to establish peer groups at the level of the facility, and ensure good conditions to conduct their meetings. It is important to continue systematically train medical professionals, who want to facilitate peer groups.

The Ukrainian-Swiss project "Medical education development" plans to continue to support the development of peer groups in Ukraine during its second phase (in 2023 – 2027).

Read some success stories of peer group facilitators on the **'Stories to know'** portal:
<https://stories.mededu.org.ua>



Olga Korolenko,
coordinator of peer
group initiative
in the Ukrainian-
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#stories_to_know



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PEOPLE DO INITIATE AND
IMPLEMENT CHANGES