Exploring Peer Health Coach (PHC) Roles in the Online Health-Management Program for Adults with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

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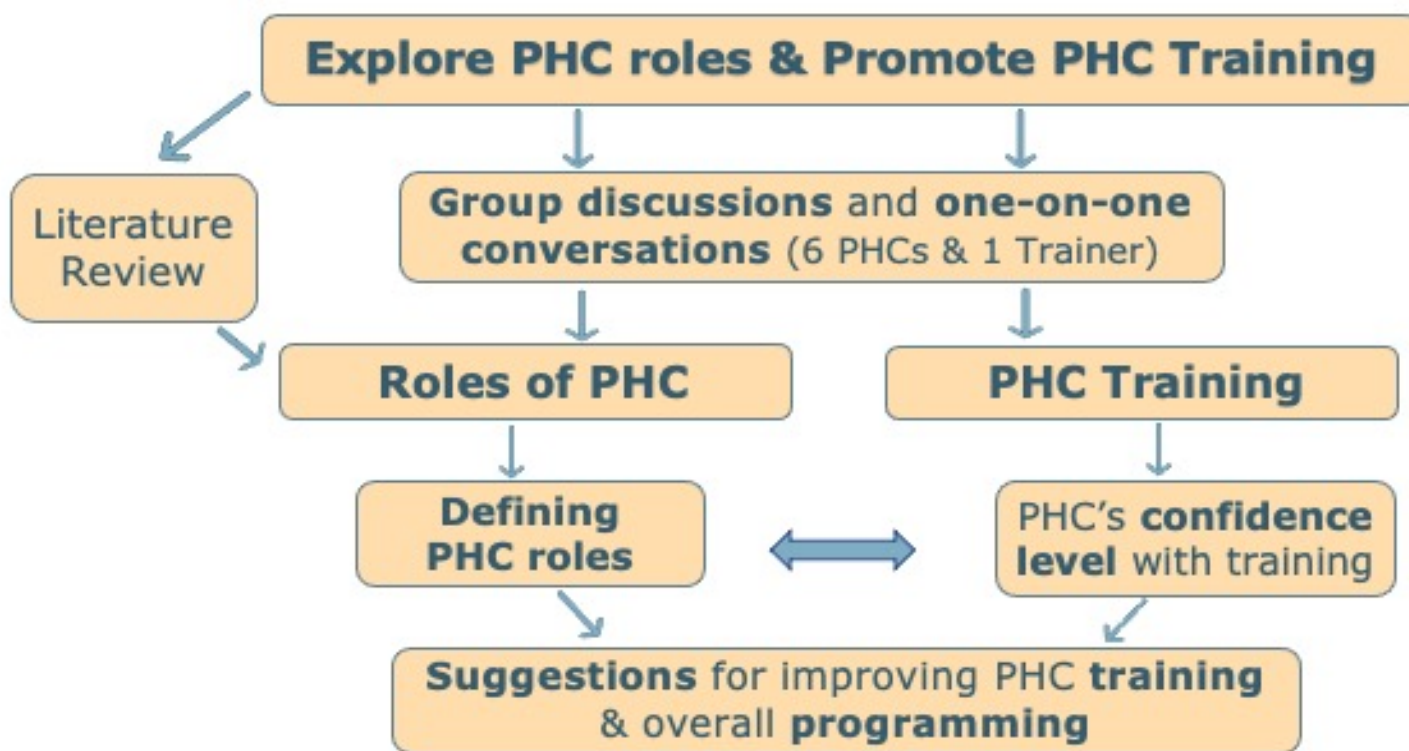
Introduction

296,000 people in the US are living with Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)
30% require re-hospitalization in 1 year post discharge(NSCISC, 2021).
- Individuals with SCI are at higher risk of developing **secondary health issues**, many of which can be prevented or managed by health management knowledge & strategies (Houlihan et al., 2017).

Gap: Services, resources, & self management tools in community currently **inadequate** for individuals with SCI (Allin et al., 2020).
SCI Peer Health Coach (PHC) can play powerful role in promoting health management as are **trained** to support peers as they adjust to life changes & manage health challenges (Skeels et al., 2017).
SCI&U: online health management program which utilizes **SCI-PHCs** & has shown potential to improve self-efficacy, quality of life & ability to address secondary SCI complications (Allin et al., 2020).
- **International cooperation** between UToronto and United Spinal Association. Research approved though **REB** of Utoronto.

Aims:
1. Describe the innovative **PHC role** in relation to traditional roles of "peer" & peer mentor".
2. Evaluate the current **PHC training** process within SCI&U.

Methods

- The investigator observed **24 PHC team meetings** to build relationship with the team & inform the training evaluation as well as the PHC roles.
- **Training materials** were reviewed & categorized to match different roles PHC served in the coaching sessions.
- **Current literature** related to PHC & peer mentor was reviewed to develop an overall **understanding** & to inform **PHC roles**.
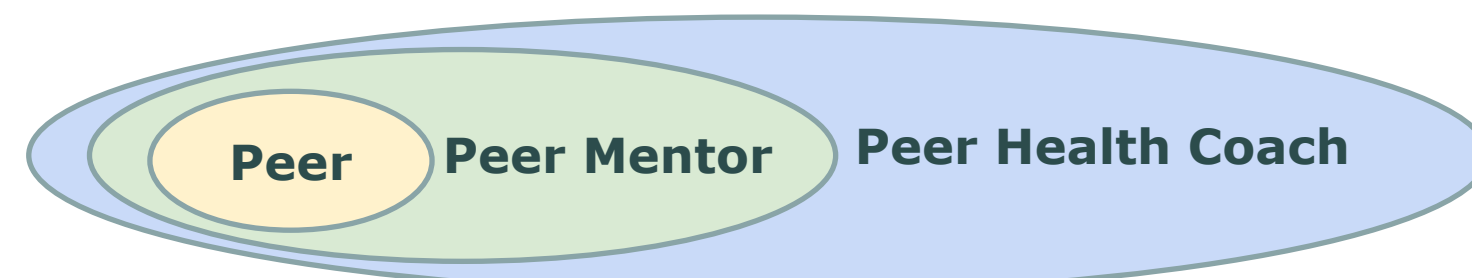
Results

PHC Definition & Characteristics

- PHCs receive over *6 months* of **evidence-based training & certificate** & participate *weekly* team meeting.
- PHCs meet people where they're at & **tailor** coaching to their needs.
- PHCs share **lived experience**, assist with **problem solving** & **skill development** & **empower** peers to work effectively towards goals.
- PHCs focus on **health-management**, including social participation, mental health, independence, self-efficacy, adaptation, knowledge/resource sharing, etc.
- SCI-PHC is a meaningful & rewarding **paid** job.

PHC Training

- **Interpersonal/Interactive skill base**
  - Relationship building
  - Shared story
  - Affirmation statement
  - Reflective listening

- **Professional skill base / Certification**
- **External** institution:
  - Brief action plan (BAP)
  - Mental health first aid*
- **Internal** training:
  - Identifying support system*
  - Resource review/organize*
  - In-between call text support
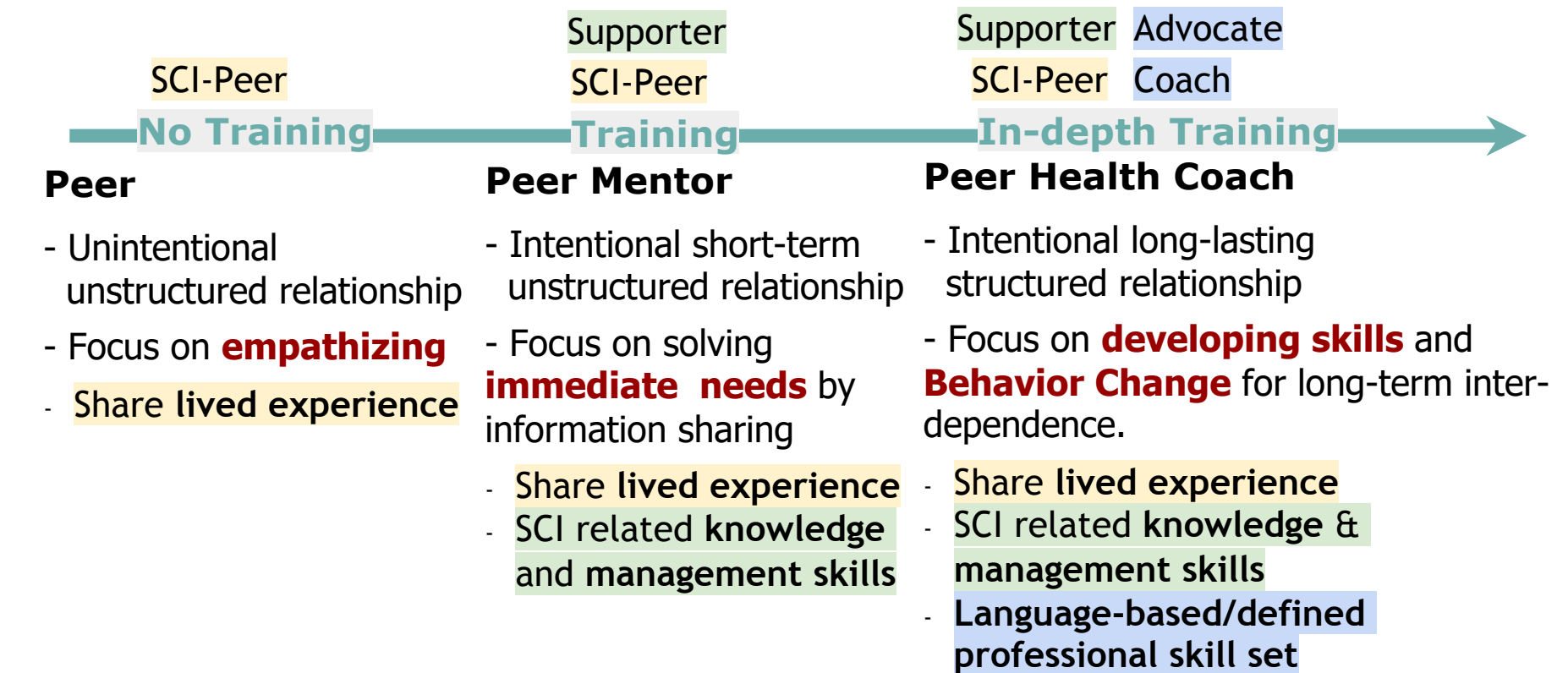 - Peer sharing coaching experience
  - Role play/simulation

PHCs feel **confident for most of the training items; need support in **Mental Health First Aid, resource review** & **identifying support system**.

Discussion

*All Peer Mentors are Peers;
All Peer Health Coaches are Peer Mentors & Peers.

PHC Roles in relation to Peer and Peer mentor

- PHC **switch** between roles **naturally to meet the specific needs** of peers.
- **Training** is the 'gear stick' that allows a PHC to **recognize** and **shift** into different modes as needed.

Conclusions

SCI-PHCs are:
- People with SCI who use their lived experience & training to interact with and support peers in developing skills, strategies, and solutions to improve and maintain all aspects of their health including physical, emotional, mental, and social health.
- Unique & powerful part of an individual's rehabilitation team and serve as messengers between peers and healthcare workers.

Goal - Disseminate findings to support recognition of & advocacy for PHC as a professional & valued member of the healthcare team!

References

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PHC Infographic