



Research Week 2022

Introducing Skin and Soft Tissue Education to People Experiencing Homelessness

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Abstract

This presentation will describe the development and goals of a skin and soft tissue care (SSTC) training program for persons experiencing homelessness (PEH), which has been developed by Portland Street Medicine (PSM) in partnership with Global Perm NW (<https://globalnw.org/impact/>). This SSTC training program was created with the intent to empower and educate PEH to increase the capacity of PEH to assess and care for skin and soft tissue problems. The primary elements of this program include the distribution of educational materials, provision of wound care supplies at accessible locations, and training sessions by health care professionals with PEH and their community partners. PSM's SSTC curriculum is evidence-based and focuses on wound care, infections, infestations, foot ailments, soft tissue assessment, and safe injection practices. The choice to focus on these topics was informed by the experiences of PEH, who contend with the realities of trauma, exposure, and substance use. PSM clinicians have overwhelmingly been sought out to attend to skin and soft tissue pathologies in various states of disrepair. In an effort to keep up with an increased demand for services during the COVID-19 pandemic, overdose epidemic, and worsening homelessness crisis, PSM leadership explored comparable scenarios and their resultant solutions. This influenced leadership at PSM to consider approaches most commonly associated with U.S. public health (i.e. CPR, naloxone training) and international community-based health initiatives, where community members are often utilized, trained, and equipped to support others. In the case of PSM's SSTC

program, training is meant to promote the prevention of severe skin and soft tissue problems in PEH. PSM's medical director, William Toepper, described the impetus for SSTC education when he summarized it as a reality-based solution to an extremely difficult problem; the question being, "What else can we do to stop minor infections from becoming catastrophic?"