



Background

Prevalence & Re-hospitalization

393,913 individuals in the U.S are living with Spinal Cord Injury, with approximately **30%** requiring re-hospitalization within a year post discharge (NSCISC,2021).

Health Risks

Individuals with SCI face increased risk for secondary health conditions, many of which can be prevented or managed through effective health management strategies (Houlihan et al., 2017).

Identified Gap

Current community resources, services, emotional and **technical support and self-management tools** for SCI individuals are all insufficient (Allin et al., 2020).

Peer Health Coaching (PHC) Approach

SCI&U is an online health management program for individuals with SCI to improve self-management through 1:1 coaching from a Peer Health Coach (PHC).

A peer health coach (PHC) can play a powerful role in promoting health self-management. They are trained to support peers as they adjust to life changes and manage health challenges (Skeels, Pernigotti, et al.,2017).

PHC-SCI Health Management Program

SCI&U uses a PHC model that has demonstrated potential in enhancing **self efficacy, quality of life, emotional distress coping, and management of secondary SCI complications** (Houlihan et al., 2017; Allin et al 2020; Jaglal et al., 2025).

Purpose

Collaborate with PHC's to develop technical resources and tools that will support and guide them during their coaching sessions.

Aims & Methods

Aim 1

Explore the role of occupational therapy (OT) in supporting the development, implementation and sustainability of peer health coaching as a profession for people with SCI.

Aim 2

Conduct a needs assessment using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with professional PHCs and multidisciplinary research team members.

Aim 3

Utilize data collected from aims 1 & 2 to create a comprehensive coaching manual for PHC's with the goal of supporting PHC's in delivering peer-led care for individuals with SCI.

Aim 1: Exploring OT Role in Peer Health Coaching

Conducted literature review with **30** articles.

Reviewed literature related to the **importance of manual development in professional settings**

Organized literature into a **spreadsheet related to peer health coaching.**

Aim 2: Needs Assessment Outcomes

Manual Content

Information needed to meet the **PHC role, including video options and visuals.**

Program Procedural Issues

- The need for structured explanation of **documenting process after coaching sessions.**
- A **reference point** to understand the flow of a coaching session.

Manual Format

- Apply Universal Design Principles**
- Clickable links** to eliminate scrolling to meet the needs of coaches using sip & puff or Eye Gaze technology.

Manual Utility

Foundational tools to support consistency and structure for PHC's to reference throughout their coaching sessions.

Aim 3: Coaching Manual Development

- Job expectations & weekly structure.
- How to use navigate the coaching platform.
- How to document sessions and goals.
- Coaching tools
 - (Reflective listening, activation levels, flow charts)
- Resources
- Protocols

- Explored and organized current literature and qualitative research.
- Conducted a needs assessment through Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with professional Peer Health Coaches living with Spinal Cord Injury.
- Met with 1:1 with coaches and attended weekly PHC meetings
- Went through the coaching process and learned how to navigate the platform

Content

Procedure

Coaching Manual

Format

Utility

- PDF format Compatible with e-readers and mobile devices.
- Clickable links** to reduce scrolling for individuals with limited hand dexterity to eliminate the need to scroll.
- In the future will be able to access the content via videos.

- Serves as a foundational tool to support **consistency, structure and effectiveness** of peer health coaching.
- Provides coaches with **evidence-based** guidelines, role clarity and practical strategies informed by the lived experiences of individuals with spinal cord injury
- Enhances the **quality of support delivered, promotes confidence among coaches.**
- Supports the sustainability and scalability of peer health coaching.

DISCUSSION

Spinal Cord Injury as Community

- Peer health coaches have created community by coming together around common goals, values or challenges.
- The SCI community fosters trust, belonging and a strong sense of collective identity exemplified by the PHC community

OT Role in Peer Health Coaching

- Occupational Therapists bring a unique and valuable skill set to the development of peer health coaching resources. Their understanding and application of **universal design** ensures that tools and materials are **inclusive, functional, and tailored to the diverse needs** of individuals with spinal cord injury (SCI).
- Through a lens of **cultural humility**, OTs collaborate with the community to create content that is not only **accessible and relevant**, but also **sustainable**—reflecting the real-life experiences, preferences, and values of those it is designed to support.

Conclusion

Supporting PHC'S as Emerging Professionals

- Emphasizes the importance of **developing resources** to guide PHC's in their practice.
- Highlights the potential of coaching as a **professional career path** for people living with SCI.

Bridging Insight and Impact

- Occupational therapists contribute an understanding and awareness of **cultural humility , universal design, accessibility and coaching practices.**
- OT's skills position them to support the **creation and sustainability** of necessary coaching materials
- This project prioritizes collaboration, centering the voices, needs and decisions of people with Spinal Cord Injury.

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