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NEXT NEWSLETTER: #06

- Update on the Covid 19 situation at UPSIDES sites
- Interview with Dr. Galia Moran (Israel)

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UPSIDES

Newsletter



#05
June
2020

#05-TOPICS

IMPACT OF COVID-19: INTERVIEW WITH LISA WENZEL AND DR. BERND PUSCHNER

HOW ARE SITES SUPPORTING UPSIDES PSWs DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?



UPSIDES has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 779263. This newsletter reflects only the authors' view. The Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



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All over the world, the Corona pandemic has changed lives and the plans for the UPSIDES project had to be reconsidered. Therefore we have modified the content of this newsletter (compared to the announcement in newsletter #4). And now we report about the impact of the Corona pandemic on the UPSIDES project.

COVID-19 response at UPSIDES sites

In view of the Covid-19 pandemic, some temporary, yet essential changes had to be made at the UPSIDES recruiting sites to ensure the safety of peer workers and study participants at each site, in alignment with measures taken by local governments or institutions. A crisis management plan was prepared which addresses the issue at hand and monitors the risks at each site.

The situation is being constantly monitored to record changes at each site. Most sites found the response of the facility asking PSWs to work from home for their safety helpful. However, the lack of access to phones, internet have been a barrier for follow ups and communication with peer workers and study participants.

Interview with Lisa Wenzel (research worker) and Dr. Bernd Puschner (UPSIDES coordinator)

Q: Can you tell us about the process for preparing the Covid-19 guidelines?

The first question we asked ourselves was how the study could continue best under the given circumstances and how this could be implemented. To do so, we continuously monitored which COVID-19 restrictions were still applied at each site. This COVID-19 monitoring was led by our colleague Ramona Hiltensperger who discussed this issue in numerous site calls during the last weeks, in addition to the already intense UPSIDES routine communication across sites. Since the safety of all involved is of paramount importance to us, we defined concrete safety measures to be applied during the continuation of the UPSIDES RCT.

Q: What were the challenges in preparing this document?

Due to the variability of the COVID-19 pandemic at each site, one of the challenges was definitely to create one document that could be applied at all study sites.

The overall strategy for the restart was to continue the UPSIDES RCT in line with the study protocol, but all measures must be in line with relevant regulations of the study sites' local governments and other institutions involved (e.g. hospitals, other service providers, etc.). Overall, the preparation for the main study, as well as the excellent cooperation across all study sites will help us to withstand the current crisis in the best way possible.

Q: How has the current Covid-19 pandemic affected the trial at your site? How do you predict this is going to impact UPSIDES work in the coming months?

Since lockdown and social distancing measures were introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, delivery of the intervention, recruitment and data collection in the UPSIDES-RCT has been paused. At the same time, a number of efforts were made to minimise dropout and to ensure well-being of study staff and participants during this period. In the future, everyone will be a little bit more careful than they already were, in order to ensure a safe working environment.

How are UPSIDES sites supporting PSWs during the Covid-19 pandemic?

In light of the current Covid-19 pandemic, the UPSIDES team is taking the necessary steps to ensure safety and wellness of PSWs, study participants and the community. While most of us have had to shift to working from home, we have centered on connectedness and hope, some of the key peer support principles. Our team has been innovative in their initiative such as online calls and video conferences among and between research staff and peer support workers despite the challenges. To be ethical, the study participants have been informed about the pause in the study trial. The German study sites Hamburg and Ulm are involving PSWs to work on an academic article sharing their experiences. As a means of providing practical support during these tough times, the research team at our Butabika site has hired a motorcycle and delivers medications at home to the PSWs.

In India, informative videos on Covid-19 and self-care during the lockdown were shared with the PSWs. The UPSIDES [facebook group](#) for PSWs is also functional for the sites that have access to internet and can be useful to provide support to one another.

PSWs are at the core of UPSIDES intervention. For it be sustainable, we require a sustained dialogue between PSWs and the community around them. For the next newsletter we will delve deeper into how sites have managed peer support implementation given the COVID-19 regulations at one of our sites at Israel. The newsletter will highlight the ongoing process of problem solving and innovation in implementation research.