

What people say about Peer-supported Open Dialogue (POD)

Source NHS UK Devon Partnership

Link to original article

<https://www.dpt.nhs.uk/resources/peer-supported-open-dialogue/what-people-say-about-peer->

The Peer-supported Open Dialogue (POD) service takes a very different approach to supporting someone. Where this approach has been used elsewhere in the world, it has proved very good at supporting people. But what do people using our service say about their experience?

Jane, middle-aged woman

I was given a mental health diagnosis thirty one years ago.

Last year Open Dialogue became part of my recovery.

My Open Dialogue meetings are my meetings. In my meetings I'm safe, respected, heard and cared for. The facilitators are gentle and I talk without feeling challenged. I can talk about what I feel I would like to talk about. Anything. OD has enhanced my relationship with my brother because he is part of the meetings. Through my OD meetings psychological therapy was identified as a possible part of my recovery. I'm now involved in this therapy. I'm not sure if this path would have been opened if I hadn't been fortunate to have OD in my recovery.

Everyone that has Open Dialogue in their lives will have some sort of journey.

John, middle-aged man

I am unsure where the dialogue is going, or if it will go anywhere in particular. All I know is that I feel supported for the first time in my life with the Open Dialogue method, and with the team. It is such a distinctly different approach, where even though I have these issues, I have the opportunity to sit with people rather than alone, and talk about how I am trying to process and self-manage my day-to-day life.

It is also acting very much as a milestone in my life, something to look forward to. Whereby I now have the confidence to dig a little deeper into myself to try to find the cause of these waves of different emotions, feelings, thoughts and behaviours. Simply because I know that if I do and hit a wall or problem that opens up and escalates, there are really kind and professional people there, who if I fall quickly implement a non-intrusive, understanding, and importantly non-judgemental environment for support.

Also, if I do not feel so bad I can, for example, ask for a meeting every fortnight instead of every week, or conversely if I have a relapse I know exactly who I can call for help. I know that if I break down when I am unable to continue alone there is still reliable and stable ongoing support, where I do not have to spend each call explaining the same initial issue to another frontline person, and can feel safe knowing that I can go deeper into the experiences that have dogged me on and off for many years.

If I am honest, at first I was sceptical, why shouldn't I be? I had been waiting to find a team like this since 2008 when I came down here. I had been told my care package would be simple to transfer, but it took 12 years or more of local GPs not understanding what was going on, not accepting that I needed to transfer my care package to the South West, despite the problems I have being fully documented and viewable in my medical reports since at least my early twenties. So, I thought this was just another box to tick on the road to finding some long-term assistance. But now I finally find myself here, so thank you.

The difference this has made to both myself, and my family, is really substantial. Earlier this year, and to date, I do believe that the team and the open dialogue facility within the NHS system saved my life. Had the team and open dialogue not been in place, I do not think I would have managed very much longer.

David, husband

Four years ago our family went through several life changing problems, the sort of issues that would make a soap plot seem far- fetched!

This caused my wife to develop severe depression and anxiety, something she had never experienced before. After three months in Exeter hospital and 12 ECT treatments she was allowed home, but I knew she still wasn't well.

After a month or so at home, she spent another month in Torbay Hospital this time. Here we came into contact with Dr Tom Cant and the Torbay mental health team... Dr Cant suggested to us that a new type of therapy was being trialled in the area, called 'Open Dialogue' and we could start the trial. I was probably keener than my wife, for at this point nothing else had worked. She was very nervous of meetings anyway, but I felt (unlike one-to-one counselling) I could join in and it might help us explore the issues that led to my wife's illness.

Dr Cant, along with the care coordinators, made us feel very relaxed from the start. We could go at our own pace and talk about anything we liked. They would then do a 'reflection' based on what they had heard and observed. The first thing I noticed was the opening sentence, "What would you like to talk about?" This was our time to explore any problems and indeed, for the first few times, the main subject was the family issues that had caused my wife to become ill in the first place.

Over time this changed in that we talked less about the past four years and more about how we can move forward. In truth I probably found it more useful than my wife. I had never experienced severe mental health before, so felt totally out of my depth, so for me, having a chance to explore how my wife was feeling (although it was hard for her to describe) with health professionals helped us both to try to understand the situation....

The fact that we had time to discuss [a new drug] in Open Dialogue is enough for me to be thankful we tried it, but Open Dialogue has been much more. It has been a chance for myself and my wife to lead the conversation, giving us a chance to unravel the complex issue of my wife's mental health. The team have always been there to help, but allowed us to explore the problems ourselves.

I am very grateful for the patience and understanding Dr Cant and the whole team have showed during these difficult times and I would not hesitate to recommend Open Dialogue.

Parent and daughter

Our enthusiasm as a family for open dialogue has grown over many months under very trying circumstances, such as both my twenty year old daughter and myself, being at separate periods hospitalised for months on compulsory orders (section 3s) and my husband as one stage needing temporary respite care.

Mental breakdowns resulting in hospitalisation are the most disorientating experiences that I have ever known. Add medication to the mix and it feels as though you can never catch up with normality or synchronise with people around you.

We feel that open dialogue has really worked well for our family because it has given us time, patience and sensitivity in order to recognise, alleviate and communicate what are often invisible or hard to get at difficulties surrounding mental illness. Psychosis can be terrifying; not necessarily during psychotic episodes but also leading up to becoming unwell. Recalling to yourself or giving explanation to others when normality seems to have resumed, you can feel bewildered, ashamed, and paranoid and the expectation of being rejected as though you have done something reproachable even though you have not.

Open dialogue has allowed us to experience a safer, kinder and more transparent setting to discuss with friends and professionals what our true problems are. These talks, we believe, have broadened our understanding, reduced paranoia and stigma, giving us greater hope and stability than we would otherwise have had.