

PORTLAND STREET MEDICINE & GLOBAL PERMANENTE NW – FINAL REPORT



Joss and Katrina, two of our amazing CHE staff who are partially funded by GPNW, facilitate a wound care workshop.

Portland Street Medicine is proud to share our final report for our Skin & Soft Tissue Care (SSTC) Program. Thanks to multiple years of funding from Global Permanente NW, we have built a sustainable and impactful program that's creating undeniable health improvements in the unhoused communities we serve. As a reminder, we'd like to share that the SSTC work that was made possible by GPNW funding became the bedrock for our newly expanded **Community Health Education (CHE) Program**, of which SSTC is a sub-program. The CHE Program offers accessible health-related workshops and training for patients, community groups and health care providers, as well as alternative

employment opportunities that create pathways to stability and self-sufficiency for homeless individuals. Thank you for years of partnership!

ACCOMPLISHMENTS & OUTCOMES

When we developed the SSTC Program, our original goals were focused on developing accessible health education materials related to soft tissue conditions, facilitating basic wound care workshops with patients and community partners, distributing and re-stocking supply boxes, and training PSM volunteers in advanced wound care. We've made steady progress on each of these goals and the success of the project inspired and influenced PSM's overall growth and direction. **Below is a summary of our impact since the project's founding in 2021:**

- **120 Skin & Soft Tissue Care Workshops** were provided, bringing accessible health education and supplies to individuals who otherwise have limited access to these resources. We now provide recurring workshops with a diverse group of six PSM partners, including a harm reduction mutual aid group, a popular meal site, a methadone clinic and two village sites.
- **12 community-based organization (CBO) partners continue to receive regular wound care supply restocks.** Each box provided includes the following supplies each month: 2,000 gauze pads; 500 band-aids; 36 rolls of tape; 48 kerlix rolls and 48 coban rolls.
- Within the CHE Program is the **Individual Learners Program**, an innovative alternative employment model that provides paid training to individual learners using our accessible curriculum. After attending twelve 2-hour trainings and countless hours of one-on-one support, each learner becomes a PSM Wound Care Technician. Participants are paid for their time and the regular income and social connection provides stability that can be life changing. The training and certification supports individuals in improving the health of their community, seeking future employment, jumpstarting a career in social services or health care, and taking other actions towards wellbeing and self-sufficiency.

Our **First Aid for Wounds Zine** continues to be a beloved resource in our community, with our partners, and with street medicine groups across the world. We have distributed over 3,000 copies and have 2,000 in stock that are

shared with workshop attendees and partners. We give a monthly workshop at a local MAT (medication assisted treatment) dispensary, Belmont Comprehensive Treatment Center. Our partnership with them has helped get



Staff members at a partner shelter site practice wound care treatments during a hands-on workshop.

copies of the zine & wound care supplies into the hands of hundreds of patients that come through each day. As you know, the zine is free for all to use and distribute and is available on our website as a PDF and in cell phone format. We plan to distribute copies to fellow street medicine practitioners at the National Health Care for the Homeless Council conference this year, where we will be presenting on our CHE Program.

We know that our CHE Program prevents ED visits, though it is difficult to quantify this impact. As an example, we have trained three Wound Care Technicians who have previous healthcare experience (two paramedics and one person with first aid training) who act as supply agents and

overdose responders. We estimate that they are **resuscitating approximately 10 people per month**, almost all successfully. While our primary goal is education, on average at least one person/workshop reaches out for help with medical decision making. Most of the conditions PSM Wound Care Technicians and workshop attendees see are in their early stages, allowing early treatment, often avoiding unnecessary ED visits. **Our team has also presented to nursing student groups, Kaiser Permanente Emergency and Urgent Care providers**, sharing PSM's work and insights about caring for people experiencing homelessness. The team discussed issues that may go unrecognized, like difficulties houseless individuals face getting to pharmacies for follow-up meds related to leaving pets and belongings, or fear of an opioid withdrawal while waiting for appointments.

In terms of challenges, **we are providing street medicine in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, which is incredibly difficult.** We lose touch with patients regularly as they are displaced by camp sweeps and other destabilizing events. As Elo (a PSM volunteer who is a DNP candidate) describes in their research paper, *A Community-Based Evaluation of an Education Wound Care Program for People Experiencing Homelessness*, many workshop participants had difficulty focusing or absorbing information due to challenges with the workshop setting (outside in the elements with extraneous noise), psychiatric conditions, and other complicating factors. We have already taken this into consideration in selecting venues for workshops and pace of information shared during the learning sessions.



Dr. Bill, Joss and a PSM volunteer facilitate a training. They also distributed zines and a fully stocked wound care box.

INDIVIDUAL IMPACT STORIES

The SSTC Program has been impactful for our providers as well. Fred Cirillo, a retired Kaiser physician shared this: "Every workshop has been an enlightening experience for me. It feels good to share the medical knowledge and

experience I have. But I also learn so much in return from the participants, about how they're managing some extraordinary health problems with creative solutions, street-smarts and folk medicine that would never be part of standard clinical experience. And most importantly, **I feel that everyone involved leaves with a sense of hope and connection** that we're all doing our best to support each other in tough times.”

Unhoused individuals engaged in our CHE Program share that they feel significantly more confident identifying skin and soft tissue conditions, identifying concerning symptoms, and using PSM-provided supplies to treat these conditions. One workshop attendee had lost three toes due to diabetes and was struggling to keep up on his wound care due to a limited budget and difficulty getting to the store to purchase supplies. Thanks to our ongoing supplies at his camp site he's now able to take care of his own wounds and his remaining toes look great!

WORKING WITH GPNW

Our partnership with GPNW has been amazing. You all have been entirely supportive and responsive to our needs and busy schedules. Your expectations are always clear and reasonable. Over the three years we have been honored to be invited to various events to share our work and make personal connections with others who have become supporters of PSM. This funding and partnership truly planted the seed for our growing and impactful Community Health Education Program. Thank you!

INTO THE FUTURE

We are excited to share that our recent presentation proposal about SSTC/CHE to the 2024 National Healthcare for the Homeless Annual Conference & Policy Symposium has been accepted! We have shared our CHE Program at various conferences in the past, including Street Medicine International's annual symposium, and Harm Reduction International's annual conference. At each conference we make new connections and learn from our colleagues in the field. The zine is always a hit and we know it has been downloaded and distributed in many cities across the US, Canada and Europe.

We are continuing our work with Alec Dunn, the illustrator and street medicine RN who has been an incredible contributor to this project. Currently we are working on accessible health education tools related to winter weather, extreme heat and fire safety. Like the First Aid for Wound Care zine, we will distribute these materials generously during outreach and for public download on our website.

