



Network of PEERS

Program Overview

SAA's Network of PEERS (**P**eople **E**ducated and **E**mpowered to **R**ise above **S**pondylitis) was developed to help people newly diagnosed with spondylitis feel less isolated, understand the importance of learning about managing the disease, and feel supported and encouraged to empower themselves to live life to the fullest. As a Peer Mentor, you play a very important role in this program because you will act as a liaison for SAA as part of the mentee's support system.

What is a Peer Mentor?

SAA's Network of PEERS program defines a peer mentor as a member of the spondylitis community who has real-life knowledge and experience in managing their spondylitis. In general, we will consider someone for the role of "Mentor" if they have been diagnosed with spondylitis for more than 3 years and are effectively managing their disease. They are knowledgeable about resources for learning about spondylitis and living with spondylitis, and would like to share their experiences with people who are newly diagnosed, or need support in managing their spondylitis.

A Mentor is someone who:

- Shares their experience of managing their spondylitis
- Provides practical day-to-day advice about living with spondylitis.
- Provides emotional support through empathy, and by listening to the mentee when they need to talk.
- Provides a positive example of active self-management of spondylitis.

A Mentor is someone who is not:

- Part of your medical treatment team, and should not be seen as such. Mentees should be encouraged to routinely see their physicians and only seek medical advice from qualified health care professionals who know your medical history.

Mentors:

- Cannot and should not provide medical advice.
- Cannot solve family, social, work, school, financial, physical or other life problems for mentees. If a mentee needs professional support, the mentor can encourage them to talk to with a psychologist, social worker or trained counselor.
- Cannot make decisions for mentees. Their role is to share their own experiences, solutions, and ways of managing their spondylitis. However, their personal approaches may not always be best for the mentee.

Who is considered a Peer Mentee?

For the purposes of the Network of PEERS, we consider someone a “mentee” if they are a person who has been newly diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis or a related disease; are in the process of developing a treatment plan that works for them; are still adjusting to living with spondylitis; and would like to talk someone who has experience with managing spondylitis.

Helping Peers Helps You

As a Peer Mentor, you provide peer support as well as receive it. You have a wealth of information and experience to share with those who are just learning how to manage their spondylitis. You may be able to provide emotional support and practical help, too.

How does providing peer support to others help you? First, helping others is good for your health. Studies show that those who volunteer their time have better health outcomes compared to those who do not volunteer. Second, the people you support may become your friends. They may help you enrich your life in many ways. Third, talking about and helping someone improve their self-management skills may help you solve problems in your own life and self-management.

Thank you!

On behalf of the SAA, we would like to thank you for considering enrollment in this program. We look forward to helping you start rewarding mentoring relationships.