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Peer experts as actors for shared understanding in Spanish online health fora

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In this study we compare how ‘peer experts’, understood as lay users who have achieved expertise and credibility on a particular health condition through personal experience (Vydiswaran & Reddy 2019), fulfill a bridging function by creating shared understandings on patient fora on diabetes vs eating disorders. The analysis revealed that the discursive construction of expertise concerning both conditions differs in relation to the weight and the nature of the personal experience claimed by the peer expert. The linguistic material deployed in each forum to index inclusion and shared understanding concerns the use of person reference, the use of cognitive verbs, as well as certain strategies that might question the experiences and shared understandings negotiated by members of both patient communities.