

Developing an Environment of Change for the Peer Recovery Support Specialist

By Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, NAADAC Executive Director

The addiction profession is at a breaking point. There are more people who need addiction prevention, treatment, and recovery support in the United States than there are addiction professionals to meet those needs. This workforce shortage is serious and will only get worse. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the need for addiction professionals will grow by 20 percent by 2026. This increased need is due to both negative factors, such as the ongoing opioid epidemic, and positive factors, such as increased public awareness, increased access due to Parity and the Affordable Care Act, and increased funding due to legislation like the 21st Century Cures Act and Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act. The addiction profession has longed for recognition and support for decades, and now that we are receiving it, we must work to meet the needs of consumers and families.

In an effort to address part of the workforce shortage, the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCCAP) is taking on the challenge of both setting national standards through its Nationally Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists (NCPRSS) credential and working to cement the Peer Recovery Support Specialist (PRSS) as an integral part of the National Career Ladder. Developed by NAADAC under a contract with Advocates for Human Potential, Inc., the National Career Ladder is accepted by partner national addiction organizations, promoted through SAMHSA and, at some levels, funded by managed care organizations (MCOs) or behavioral health and wellness services.



Certified Peers should be used as one component of a comprehensive, holistic, and evidence-based system of care. The scope of practice and the range of services that this position can support is vast. A certified NCPRSS can provide one-on-one support in navigating health and mutual support systems, services, and supports, facilitate introduction to a mutual support group, and/or provide community services connections to education, employment, housing, clothing, food, transportation, child care, alumni support groups and systems. A NCPRSS can also be a part of a client services team in hospitals, clinics, and treatment centers. While not an exhaustive list, these are services that addiction counselors often do not have the time to support due to large caseloads, and are services that clients can benefit from immensely.

NCCAP recognizes that it is important to gain acceptance and recognition of Peer Recovery Support Specialists within the continuum of care to ensure that funders (states, MCOs, Medicaid, and others) will not supplant Peers for other trained, credentialed, and educated addiction professionals. To prevent this, NCCAP has clearly laid out the scope of practice of the NCPRSS and works to ensure that certified Peer Recovery Support Specialists will be supported with the type of supervision and support that will protect their recovery and those that they serve.

We are happy to report that behavioral health organizations as a whole are increasing the use of PRSS as part of the continuum of care. Some states are reimbursing services through publicly funded agencies for PRSS



services, while other states also support these services through Medicaid funding. Some MCOs are also recognizing the value of the services provided by those with this credential and providing reimbursement for them. NCC AP has also received acceptance of our NCPRSS national credential for reimbursement through Optum. Optum, like many others, recognizes that: 1) the NCPRSS credential is a national credential and thereby adheres to the same criteria in every state/jurisdiction that adopts it; 2) there is a national credential portfolio kept at the NCC AP/NAADAC offices; 3) there is a national PRSS Code of Ethics that is tied to the NCPRSS credential with a national body to review ethics complaints; and 4) that NCPRSS-credentialed individuals can obtain malpractice insurance — which is important to the facilities that use Peer Recovery Support Specialist services and also important to third-party reimbursers.

There is work to be done to increase the acceptance of the NCPRSS in the treatment and recovery support environment. First, we will work toward the continued and increasing acceptance of the NCC AP NCPRSS national credential to support quality education and supervision, reimbursement, and portability. Second, we will work to develop and ensure broad reimbursement systems by MCOs, state-supported programs, the VA/Tricare, and Medicaid systems for NCPRSS, as well as continued increased acceptance for addiction counselors. Third, we will work to promote internal billing systems that are able to accurately bill with service codes at each level of service. Fourth, we will work to expand access to these services throughout addiction and mental health agencies, hospitals, emergency rooms, health care clinics, and other community based service

centers such as emergency housing, food banks, clothing/housing supports, and other relevant services. Finally, we will support studies that explore the effectiveness of NCPRSS and addiction counselors specific to their scope(s) of practice.

NCC AP is working to bring more Peers into the national credentialing process for PRSS and embrace them in the continuum of care for addiction and mental health services. Together, we can build a comprehensive, standardized and qualified national Peer Recovery Support Specialist system that embraces their specific field of work and supports the health and wellness of individuals, families and communities across the national and eventually, across the globe.

Blessings, Cynthia



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals, and has worked as an addiction professional for over 35 years. She has been a trainer in Domestic Violence/Anger Management and Conflict Resolution for over 25 years as well as an international, national and state trainer in a variety of topics. Moreno Tuohy is also a curriculum writer in addiction screening and evaluation, counseling methods, conflict resolution, co-occurring disorders, and medicated assisted treatment and recovery, and has written articles published in national and other trade magazines. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work and is certified both nationally and in Washington State.

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