

Ethics & Peer Recovery Support

By Gerard J. Schmidt, MA, LPC, MAC, NAADAC President

The introduction to NAADAC's newly updated Code of Ethics states that "Ethics are generally regarded as the standards that govern the conduct of a person." As treatment professionals, we must keep this principal ever before us as we interact, work with, coach, and treat those individuals whose care has been entrusted to us.

Clients come to us seeking not only guidance and a path to recovery, but also insight into a change in life style and a process for that change. We as treatment professionals need to be guarded in how we direct and assist these individuals in this change process. We need to be aware of our own biases and be careful so as to not impose these onto our clients. In addition to this, we need to take those steps to be certain that we are open to the client's needs, desires, self-determination and willingness to engage in treatment to the extent they can at the onset and throughout their course of care.

Peer recovery support is in many ways somewhat of a return to where the addiction profession began, now with clearer boundaries, knowledge, skills, and abilities attached to the process. It is an essential element in the continuum of care for an individual in their treatment and recovery processes. Peer Recovery Support Specialists are individuals who are in

recovery from substance use and/or co-occurring mental health disorders and can often times present unique and conflicting aspects to the interactions peer recovery support specialists might have with the people they are supporting. Transference and counter-transference issues abound without the supervision and clinical support necessary to monitor and evaluate the health of the peer recovery support specialist. Due to the complexity and uniqueness of these potential issues, NAADAC, the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCCAP), and the Peer Recovery Support Specialist Development Advisory Committee felt it vital to create a separate Code of Ethics specifically for Peer Recovery Support Specialists to help recovery support specialists navigate the unique space of their scope of practice and avoid potential pitfalls.

The NAADAC/NCCAP National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) Code of Ethics outlines basic values and principles of peer recovery support practice and serves as a guide for responsible and ethical standards for peer recovery support.

First and foremost, peer recovery support specialists have a responsibility to understand the boundaries and scope of their expertise, be aware

President, continued on page 7



of the limits of their training and capabilities, and collaborate with other professionals and recovery support specialists to best meet the needs of the persons they are serving. They have a responsibility to help persons in recovery achieve their own personal recovery goals by promoting self-determination, personal responsibility, and the empowerment inherent in self-directed recovery. Peer recovery support specialists need to be able to recognize when a person they are working with is in need of additional care beyond the scope of their services. Often times peer recovery support specialists become enmeshed in the supportive relationship they have and fail to see outside of their services to the total continuum of care for an individual in early recovery who might be in need of therapeutic, education and/or vocational services. Peer recovery support specialists need to be careful that they do not practice outside of their scope of practice/service and do not give the person they are serving the impression that they are either directly or indirectly providing counseling or other clinical services to that individual.

Peer recovery support specialists also need to remain skilled and knowledgeable in the core competencies related to their specific role in the continuum of care. They have a responsibility to keep a basic level of understanding of the continually evolving issues surrounding substance use, addiction, recovery, and mental health fields, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the referral resources in their community from basic needs (housing, food, clothes), to medical and emergent care, to therapeutic services. They need to have a level of understanding of the diseases, the progression of the diseases, the continuum of care available to support the treatment and recovery of these diseases, and how to help the persons they serve receive the treatments and services necessary for recovery. While peer support is an invaluable and an essential part of early, as well as long term, recovery, peer recovery support specialists need to remain current on treatment issues, open to feedback via treatment team, and responsive to fluctuating changes on the part of the persons they are serving. There are going to be times where an adjustment in an individual's care plan is necessary and peer support plays a critical role in assisting the individual to the level of care or to the resources necessary for healthy and responsible decisions. To this end, peer recovery support specialists must be current on all available treatment resources, and be in the position to assist the individual to the appropriate resource, or assist as part of the treatment team in accessing that care.

Throughout this all, peer recovery support specialists also have a responsibility to maintain high standards of personal conduct and conduct themselves in a manner that supports their own recovery, to seek their own recovery supports and maintain a system of support that is a safety net for their own long-term recovery.

The complexities discussed above call into focus the need for peer recovery support specialists to maintain regular and structured supervision. Treatment providers need to be engaged in ongoing clinical support for the services they are providing. Many peer recovery support specialists have never been in a setting where they are part of a continuum of care, whether directly or indirectly involved in a multi-disciplinary team providing a variety of services for a person in recovery. It is important and critical to the care of the individual that recovery support specialists receive support, guidance, and insight in the review of the supportive services they are providing. How this supervision structure is employed will be dependent on how and where individuals are affiliated in their recovery support service provision of care. In some instances, peer recovery support specialists are private providers working in a contractual setting with other providers or not, while others are part of a total continuum of care provided by a

single entity. Either way, peer recovery support specialists need to perceive the value of this supervisory relationship and the vital role it plays in the provision of the services they are engaged in as well as in their own support system to undergird the work they are doing.

The role of peer recovery support specialists is vital in the ever changing and emerging profession of long-term recovery for those with substance use and mental health disorders. In today's time with the uncertainty of the Affordable Care Act, consistent and quality treatment in a changing and uncertain environment is critical. However, we need to make certain that peer recovery support specialists are upholding themselves to the basic values and principles of peer recovery support practice/services and do not violate boundaries and ethical standards. We need to take special measures to ensure those that are new coming into the delivery of peer recovery support are prepared in advance for the tasks they are being entrusted with and are encouraged and exposed to ongoing training and education on substance use and mental health disorders and all of the related issues.

Those doing the vital work of recovery support need to embrace and review NAADAC's National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) Code of Ethics. Each have a responsibility to know and honor the scope of practice/services as well as being aware of potential pitfalls and of colleagues or anyone who appears to be in violation or askew of these. Our mantra should always be: "do no harm and do not go beyond your area of expertise, training or education."

To learn more about the National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) credential and/or Code of Ethics, please visit www.naadac.org/ncprss.



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had served as Chair of the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCC AP) and NAADAC's Public Policy Committee, and as NAADAC's Clinical Affairs Consultant. Awards include the Distinguished Service Award in 2003 and the Senator Harold Hughes Advocate of the Year in 2010. In addition to his national and international work, Schmidt has been active within West Virginia in advocating and supporting State legislative issues related to addictions and addiction treatment.

Executive Director, continued from page 5

addiction to the point of working with NIAAA to study the competencies, knowledge components and skills necessary to treat the diseases of addiction. NAADAC continues to educate and leverage your voice in the Federal, State and Public market place! 45 years strong and not waiving from the vision nor the mission to be the premier organization for addiction focused professionals to serve those individuals, families and communities that are needing the education, prevention, treatment, and recovery support to reduce the ravages of these diseases of the brain that are known as addiction/substance use disorders and co-occurring disorders. Stand with us as we move to engage the new Administration and Congress to build a stronger and more secure America!



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