

Mastering Essential Business Operations

Learning Networks Attracts More Than 800 Organizations Focused on Preparing for Health Care Reform

By KIM JOHNSON, MBA

More than 800 addiction treatment providers across the country are participating in the first round of learning networks offered through BHBUSINESS: Mastering Essential Business Operations. The learning networks focus on the business skills organizations need to be fully prepared for the changes anticipated — and in some cases, already underway — with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act.

This SAMHSA-funded initiative is administered by the State Associations of Addiction Services (SAAS) in partnership with NIATx, Advocates for Human Potential (AHP), and the National Council. The four organizations have pooled their expertise, training materials, consultants, and mailing lists to offer the field top-notch training that participants can apply in their organizations while they're ramping up for 2014. Experienced coaches and consultants from each of the four organizations serve as faculty for the learning networks.

Key components of the BHBUSINESS program include:

STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLANNING: learning about how the new reimbursement methods, expanded access to coverage, accountable care organizations, redesigned systems of care and other aspects of the changing health system affects your organization. Participants will walk away with a business plan that incorporates knowledge gained in market and organizational assessments.

THIRD PARTY/BILLING AND COMPLIANCE: learning how to implement third-party billing systems, how to improve existing systems and to identifying core compliance measures and ways to design systems that reduce risk to your organization.

THIRD PARTY/CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS: understanding the payer's perspective, demonstrating the value of your services and attracting new payers using sales and marketing strategies.

ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION: learning how to address issues in your enrollment process that reduce access to care and reduce potential revenue. Organizations will develop processes for assessing patient eligibility and enrolling patients in plans.

MEANINGFUL USE OF HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: expanding your knowledge of Health Information Technology, including how HIT and Electronic Health Record systems can help improve patient care and business management.

Twenty groups of 30 providers (representing more than 1,200 individuals) have enrolled in the learning networks that launched in early March: Strategic Business Planning and Third-party Billing and Compliance. Three other learning networks that launched in May include Third-Party/Contract Negotiations, Eligibility Determination and Meaningful use of Health Information Technology. The first round of learning networks will run through September 2013, with the second round beginning shortly after.

Designed to accommodate the schedules of busy professionals, the learning networks combine online learning, individual and group coaching via telephone and in-person consulting. Curriculum developers created the training modules using the latest distance

learning technology that allows for student-teacher interaction in real time, as well as other lessons and required readings that participants can complete at their convenience.

Peer sharing plays an important role in the learning networks. Treatment providers are so consumed with the day-to-day operations of their organizations that they often feel isolated. To offset that, the BHBUSINESS learning networks draw from the success of other projects that gave participants a chance to connect with each other, brainstorm and solve problems.

Katharine Kirchmeyer, Director of Administrative Services for Alcohol and Drug Dependency Services, Inc. in Buffalo, New York, welcomes the peer sharing.

Kirchmeyer is participating in one of the BHBUSINESS Strategic Business learning networks.

"This exercise has been such a great opportunity for our agency," she says. "It's allowed us to work with and get feedback from a number of agencies across New York State. We always tend to think we're alone when dealing with difficult internal and external factors, especially when it comes to government regulations and insurance

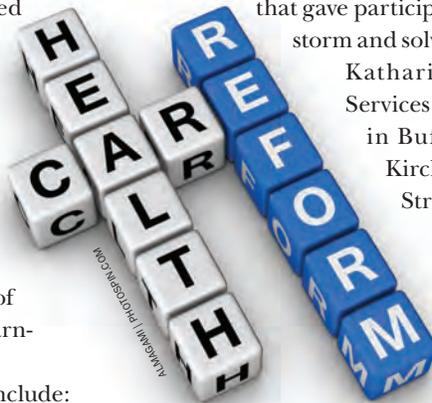
and managed care companies, so it's nice to be reminded that we're not. These types of forums are also good to discover solutions that you'd never think of on your own."

Nancy Crean, Director of Program Development and Contracts of Transitional Living Services of Northern New York in Watertown is also participating in the Strategic Business Planning learning network.

"The timing of this training could not be better, as our agency is starting a new strategic planning cycle. The knowledge and perspective we are gaining is incredibly empowering."

"As we move forward in this new health care environment, it is critical that addiction-focused professionals understand the opportunities and challenges that we face," said Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CCDIC III, SAP, Executive Director of NAADAC. "The BHBUSINESS program can help our agencies thrive as we move forward and help forge relationships with Preferred Provider, Managed Care and Behavioral Health organization (PPO/MCO/BHO) third party payers for reimbursement of health care services."

For more information visit <http://saasnet.org/bhb/index.php> or e-mail info@bhbusiness.org.



Kim Johnson, MBA, is the deputy director for operations of NIATx, a research center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison that focuses on systems improvement in behavioral health. She is also director of the ACTION (Adopting Changes to Improve Outcomes Now) Campaign, a national campaign to improve access to and retention in treatment. Johnson has also been an executive director of a treatment agency, managed intervention and prevention programs and been a child and family therapist. She has a Master's degree in counselor education and an MBA.



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