

Are Addiction Knowledge, Competencies, Skills, and Attitudes No Longer Necessary in the Behavioral Health Integration World?

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

With the onset of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the push for “behavioral health” integration, many states are now turning their attention to the details of forming integrated systems that merge mental health with addiction practice. However, some states are now pushing out the foundation of addiction practice by removing the requirement of specific substance use disorder (SUD) education and experience to allow for the practice of addiction counseling without specialized education, training, or experience needed for effective and proper practice. Some states are using the need for an increase in the addiction workforce as a reason to “open the door” to this specialized profession to any counseling professional, including persons only trained in Social Work, Marriage and Family, and Licensed Counseling Professionals with no specific education in SUD nor any applied practice in SUD.

NAADAC asserts that addiction counseling and treatment is a health specialty and that the provision of culturally relevant evidence-based practices and the demonstration of significant treatment outcomes depend on an effectively trained and supported workforce specific to SUD. Along that vein, NAADAC strongly believes that only SUD professionals are qualified to provide clinical supervision for those working to become SUD professionals and not other counseling professionals that do not have this specific training.

NAADAC supports the importance of having SUD education and specific training as part of the requirement for licensure, certification, or other practice regulations. This requirement lines up with the Substance Abuse Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) *Scopes of Practice & Career Ladder for Substance Use Disorder Counseling*, which has been accepted as a credible and reasonable requirement for those serving SUD patients (SAMHSA, 2011). Currently, there are 17 states that have a licensure law supporting substance use disorder specific licensure and supporting specific education and training requirements specific to SUD, and with the Affordable Care Act now in effect, many more states have similar licensure laws in the works. These laws and rules support the protection of the patient to receive care that is specialized to the needs of their disorder. Just as one would not send a heart disease patient to a general practitioner, one would not send a SUD patient to a general counselor who has not been educated and trained in the specific disorder or substance use.

Both the SAMHSA-funded and recommended *TAP 21: Addiction Counseling Competencies – the Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes of Professional Practice* (SAMHSA, 2007), which outlines the 123 competencies, skills, and attitudes necessary in order to treat SUDs, and *TAP 21-A: Competencies for Substance Abuse Treatment Clinical Supervisors* (SAMHSA, 2008), which outlines the competencies, skills and attitudes to serve as a Clinical Supervisor, clearly state that without specific

education, training, clinical supervision, and experience in SUD, these competencies, skills, and attitudes cannot be obtained.

NAADAC has understood the importance to set standards in SUD education, training, and services and therefore created an approval system for trainers. As the profession developed from training as the basis of training in order to learn these skills, to a more formalized education process with higher education courses, NAADAC worked with the International Coalition for Addiction Studies Education (INCASE) to create the National Addictions Studies Accreditation Commission (NASAC), the only accrediting body that represents addiction-focused educators and practitioners specifically. This further laid the infrastructure and framework in which to train and educate in SUD. NASAC has gone on to develop national standards for addiction education from the two year Associate’s degree to the PhD level with the ground work developed by the Official Task Force for SAMHSA on addiction education funded by SAMHSA. This national standardized higher education framework gives solid levels of education and competency to treat SUD and build effective treatment programming. NAADAC’s National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCCAP) is able to work with colleges and universities that adhere to these higher education standards to allow for testing of the certification test before the student completes their degree requirements. This allows the student to demonstrate competency before they leave the education institution with a test score, to then gather the “practice and experiential” hours necessary on the ground to then test for the credentials once those hours of experience are achieved. Since these credentials are the same from state to state, it truly becomes a reciprocal system for those states that adhere to the standards, thereby creating a strong infrastructure of trained professionals with demonstrated competency. Credentialing can be made even more transferable between states and commensurate with national credentials if all states used the NCC AP test as their state certification/licensing exam. The SUD practitioner is happy as they only have to test once and carry those scores, and they have demonstrated that skill for everyone to validate in their state credentialing system. In addition, employers, health care providers, government entities, other practitioners, and the public are happy because such standardized credentials aid in the identification of quality individuals who have met national competency standards.

It is vital in this changing environment that each state system is able to validate and ensure that that counselors performing SUD treatment services within the state carry the education, tools, and competencies necessary for effective services. Clients and their family members, and the public, deserve counselors specifically educated in SUDs to perform the tasks of assessment, adherence to treatment, and long-term recovery.

Legislative/Advocacy, continued on page 6 ➤

The specialty of addiction practice is further supported by the federal government's recent support for expanding the addiction workforce. NAADAC, along with other addiction-focused organizations, has long advocated for federal funding for minority fellowships scholarships specific to the addiction workforce, commensurate with those available for other professions. After eight years of advocacy and meeting with federal agencies, this funding was finally supported in President Obama's newly released budget in the "Now Is The Time – Healthy Transitions" section (SAMHSA, 2014). The recognition of the importance of addiction-specific training and education is finally appreciated through the creation of this specific workforce-building effort. It is likely that counselors across the country will learn more about these future opportunities to apply for these Master level scholarships this fall.

Addiction professionals are an integral part of the health team and are capable of being taught the skills and knowledge areas specific to working in an integrated care environment. NAADAC is continuing to build relationships with other helping professional groups such as the American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, International Association of Peer Specialists, Council on Social Work Education and the American Psychiatric Nurses Association through work on the *Recovery to Practice (RTP) Initiative* to create an exchange of information and education and build respect and understanding between our professionals that ultimately affects the services of the client/patient.

NAADAC will continue to emphasize and build relationships through intraprofessional collaboration to meet the various needs and complexities of the clients/patients we serve, especially those with mental health and SUDs. NAADAC will continue to support the specific education of addiction studies and the maintenance of the specialty of addiction treatment and care. NAADAC will also continue to build the leadership to assist in the maintenance of these goals in order to sustain the workforce needs in the future.

Now is the time to work toward licensure in the states that do not have licensure laws for addiction specific knowledge, skills and competencies. Together, we can continue to build the health care treatment needs of the future allowing for the specialty of substance use disorders through addiction professionals.

REFERENCES

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2008). *Addiction Counseling Competencies: The Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes of Professional Practice*. Technical Assistance Publication (TAP) Series 21. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 08-4171. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006.

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2008). *Competencies for Substance Abuse Treatment Clinical Supervisors*. Technical Assistance Publication (TAP) Series 21-A. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 12-4243. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007.

Southern Coast Addiction Technology Transfer Center. *Applying the TAP 21 to Certification Standards & Other Addiction Treatment Workforce Improvement Initiatives*.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2014). FY2014 funding for SAMHSA expands vital mental health services – especially for children and youth [Press release]. <http://www.samhsa.gov/newsroom/advisories/1402112340.aspx>.



Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, NCAC II, CCDC III, SAP, is the Executive Director of NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals. She previously served as the Executive Director of Danya Institute and the Central East Addiction Technology Transfer Center and as Program Director for Volunteers of America Western Washington. In addition, she has over 20 years of experience serving as the administrator of multi-county, publicly funded alcohol/drug prevention/intervention/treatment centers with services ranging from prenatal care to the serving the elderly.

- At least 30 hours of education specific to SUD clinical supervision; and
- A passing score on the National Clinical Supervision exam.

For more information, visit www.naadac.org/clinical-supervision-endorsement

The NCC AP has been successful in the oversight and development of its credentials and endorsements because of the generous support and dedication of our volunteer committees. Many who contribute to product development are not sitting members of the NCC AP yet when called upon to share knowledge and their expertise in a particular specialty, they are most willing to aid. As a profession, we should all be proud of the volunteer workforce that supports and sustains our national credentials and its testing products.

Many thanks and highest regards to our Credential Development Committees.



Kathryn Benson, NCAC II, LADC, QSAP, QSC, serves as Chair of the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCCAP). Contact her at lightbeing@aol.com with your thoughts or questions. Every effort will be made to respond to your inquires in either this publication or a personal reply.

An Exclusive Women's Addiction Treatment Facility
Fort Lauderdale, Florida



NEW RIVER WELLNESS CENTER
"Where New Journeys Begin."

Our mission is to provide the highest quality personalized treatment program possible to restore the addicted woman and her family to a place of: dignity, respect, and autonomy.

Our comprehensive continuum of care provides high quality, evidence based medical and clinical interventions, within a well-rounded holistic treatment program focused on:

- Drug and Alcohol Addiction
- Depression
- Anxiety and Panic
- Grief and Loss
- Physical, Emotional, and Sexual Abuse
- Disordered Eating and Nutritional Issues
- Self-Injury
- Codependency
- Mood Disorders
- Sexual Compulsivity
- Obsessive Compulsive Behaviors

We integrate and utilize:

- On site Psychiatrists
- Doctorate Level Clinical Therapists
- Licensed Masters Level Clinical Therapists
- Acupuncturists
- Expressive Arts Therapists
- Certified Behavioral Health Technicians

to adhere to our strength-based, gender-responsive model within a relational, trauma-informed, and culturally diverse style of treatment.

1-877-MY-RECOVERY
www.newriverwellnesscenter.com




Congratulations on 40 years of Addiction Awareness and Education, NAADAC!