

The Role and Value of National Certification for Recovery Support Specialists

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Role of Peer Recovery Support Specialists

In 2011, as SAMHSA anticipated and prepared for the creation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), much attention was given to the fundamental need to integrate substance use disorder (SUD) treatment services into the full spectrum of a behavioral health care model.

In 2012, a national committee was convened to begin the process of identifying consumer needs, healthcare resources, and the possibility of creating a new level of service delivery through a Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS) approach.

Peer Recovery Support Specialists were defined as individuals who are in recovery from life altering substance use disorders or mental health disorders which have caused life disruption. Their life experiences allow them to provide recovery support in such a way that others can benefit from their experiences.

First and foremost, in the course of this developmental process, a clear delineation of roles was established. Everyone understood the fundamental goal was to have service delivery be more immediate and cost effective, while supporting SUD counselors in their role of patient clinical caregiver.

Crosswalks were established to best identify the scope of activities that the PRS would provide the consumer vs. the scope of practice of the SUD counselor. Distinctions were made in the role and provision of services, which included planning, resource utilization, illness management, medication management, employment, housing, and educational service. It was crucial that the role of the PRS be understood to be a non-clinical role with the focus in this integrated system to be one of recovery support.

Role delineation was essential in order to then establish the components of an effective PRS and to insure appropriate and quality consumer service delivery. Identified components included eligibility criteria, training and education, supervision and integration into SUD continuum of care. Ethical standards and codes of conduct were established along with the recognition of need for a credentialing process. Additional policy and procedures were developed to assist service providers in the effective use of this PRS service.

With the support of SAMHSA, these components came into existence through individual state authorities. It also became clear that the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCC AP) needed to move forward with creating a national credential to help consolidate the best of all identified factors.

NCPRSS Credential

NCC AP was committed to standardize on a national level, the competency of peer support to individuals with substance use — and co-occurring mental health — disorders and created the Nationally Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) credential. This experience-based credential focuses on the individual and provides a formal indicator of the current knowledge and competence needed at the national level. NCC AP successfully established formal PRS national eligibility criteria, educational and training requirements, code of ethics, and core competencies for this new level of care. This national standard encourages Peer Specialists to continue to enhance their skills for the welfare of consumers and establishes, measures, and monitors requirements for required knowledge. The NCPRSS credential provides assistance to employers, health care providers, government entities, other practitioners, and the public in the identification of quality individuals who have met national competency standards.

It was understood a formal testing instrument was necessary for individuals and state authorities for use in determining and reflecting a basic level of knowledge to best insure protection of consumer and public welfare. NCC AP, through the nationwide involvement of professionals and peer support specialists, has created a national certification process that provides the path for individuals to follow in order to demonstrate their knowledge and skill in their role as a primary peer support provider. Through this standardized testing and portfolio review, NCC AP is able to set a benchmark for recognition of Peer Recovery Support Specialists and monitor the skills and abilities of those providing peer recovery support services.

Candidates for the Peer Recovery Support Specialist Credential must meet the following criteria:

- High school diploma or GED or higher;
- Minimum of one year of direct practice (paid or volunteer);

- 125 hours education and training in addiction with a minimum of six hours training in addiction-specific ethics and three hours training in HIV/AIDS/communicable diseases. Training must be within the past five years;
- Minimum one year of recovery from substance use/co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders (self-attestation), if applicable;
- Read and sign a statement on the Application affirming adherence to the NAADAC Peer Recovery Support Specialist Code of Ethics;
- Complete all sections of the online test Application.
- Take and pass the Peer Recovery Support Specialist examination. Upon passing the exam, contact the NCC AP and submit any additional required fees and documentation required; and
- Receive final approval of the NCCAP to obtain the credential.

It is imperative that the consumer be served by Peer Support Specialists who have received consistent training and serve under formal qualified supervision.

Support for Credential

We are very pleased to report the growing support for and recognition of the value of the NCCPRSS within the system of care. Most recently, Optum, Inc., which operates one of the nation's leading managed behavioral health care organizations, has expressed strong interest in recruiting individuals who have completed the NCCPRSS to be part of its behavioral network of providers' system of care in order to expand the range of services available to consumers. We hope other MCOs and BHOs will follow suit and embrace the NCCPRSS credential as an essential path for both the providers and the insurers of these treatment services to instill confidence that the service activities that will best benefit the consumer are being provided by knowledgeable and skilled specialists.



Kathryn Benson, NCAC II, LADC, QSAP, QSC, serves as Chair of the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCCAP), and has worked in the counseling profession since 1972, specializing in addiction issues since 1978. She may be contacted at lightbeing@aol.com with your thoughts or questions.



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