

Executive Interview: Meet Your New President, Gerard J. Schmidt, MA, LPC, MAC

By Jessica Gleason, JD, NAADAC Director of Communications

At the close of NAADAC's 2016 Annual Conference in early October, Gerard J. Schmidt, MA, LPC, MAC started his two-year term as NAADAC's President. Schmidt has been in the mental health and addictions treatment field for the past 45 years, spending the last 36 years as the Chief Operations Officer at Valley HealthCare System in Morgantown, WV. He has a Bachelor's of Arts Degree in Psychology from Fairmont State University, a Master's Degree from West Virginia University, and is a licensed professional counselor (LPC), a certified addictions counselor (CAC), and a certified Master Addictions Counselor (MAC). Schmidt started his career with the State of West Virginia working as an alcohol and drug counselor and since that time has been a prominent developer of an extensive array of addiction treatment services within north central West Virginia. He is the former president of the West Virginia Association of Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors and was awarded its Distinguished Service Award in 2003.



A NAADAC member since 1989, Schmidt previously served as NAADAC's Clinical Affairs Consultant, Chair of the Public Policy Committee, Chair of the Certification Commission, and a member of the Advisory and Development Committee for NAADAC's Recovery to Practice Initiative. Schmidt was a key developer of NAADAC's Life-Long Learning Series and has been active in the coordination and delivery of the series of Practitioners Services Network (PSN) projects for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT). He has been instrumental in the development of NAADAC's legislative agenda over the years. Due to Schmidt's strong efforts advocating for substance use disorders and mental health parity, he was named NAADAC's 2010 Senator Harold Hughes Advocate of the Year.

Schmidt has presented at numerous NAADAC events, trainings, and conferences, trained and consulted both nationally and internationally on behalf of the Association, and has a variety of publications to his credit. He has been active with the Mid-Atlantic Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) in establishing the State of West Virginia as a partner in the Mid-Atlantic ATTC region and currently sits on its Advisory Board in Richmond, VA.

Gleason: Why did you decide to go into the addiction profession? How did you get started?

SCHMIDT: I have to be honest; I did not choose this profession, but rather feel as though it chose me. In 1971, I was fresh out of undergraduate school, the Viet Nam War was ongoing, and I was working as a meat cutter to pay my way through college. I knew I wanted to work with individuals

who had problems or issues in their lives and I had a job interview with a state-run program that happened to have an opening for a Substance Abuse Counselor. As luck would have it, the gentleman who interviewed me knew little about this newly emerging treatment practice. I was eager to learn and he gave me the opportunity to do just that. I read as much as I could find about the subject, attended workshops and conferences, and quickly realized that I needed more education and counseling skills, so I began working on my counseling degree while working full time. It was at this point that I knew I found the population with whom I wanted to work, although I had no idea that 46 years later, I would still be here. I fell in love with the ability to connect with clients and their families and looking at new, innovative ways of approaching treatment while simultaneously having the opportunity to learn more and more from those who I

treated. I was fortunate to have many great mentors over the years, which helped me shape my approach to treatment and gave me the opportunity to grow and expand my areas of interest within the addiction profession.

Gleason: How did you become involved with NAADAC and decide to pursue a role in NAADAC's leadership?

SCHMIDT: I first became involved with NAADAC when the newly organized West Virginia addiction membership organization became affiliated with NAADAC in 1983. I was active in West Virginia's association and eventually became the president. As President, I attended NAADAC's national conferences and meetings and was exposed to the work that NAADAC was doing on the national level. I was fortunate to meet and interact with some of NAADAC's leadership at that time and was asked to serve on the newly formed NAADAC Certification Commission, now known as the National Certification Commission for Addiction Professionals (NCC AP). After serving on the commission for four years, I was asked to be the Chair. Serving in this role led to many other leadership opportunities within NAADAC, including working as the Clinical Affairs Consultant and eventually as the Chair of the Public Policy Committee, and taking an active role in advocacy within NAADAC.

Gleason: What motivated you to run for NAADAC President?

SCHMIDT: Having been in the profession for the past 45 years and having had the wonderful experiences of being exposed to a variety of marvelous trainers and training opportunities myself, in the past 15 years I have felt the need to give back to the profession. I think we all have a responsibility to support and develop the future workforce to maintain the

identity of the profession. In considering my role in the NAADAC leadership, I felt that I had some ideas and strategies that would be helpful in moving the organization forward and continuing to support and grow the workforce, so I decided perhaps I could best do that as NAADAC's president. I am blessed that the executive leadership is strong and that I will have the chance to work with a bright, articulate, and motivated group of leadership professionals over these next two years. I look forward to working with and learning from them.

Gleason: How would you describe your leadership style?

SCHMIDT: I like to believe that my style is inclusive. I want input from as many people as possible. I do not believe that just because you are in a leadership role input flows only from the top down. I have learned over the years that in remaining open to input and feedback, you can experience much more growth and development and have access to many more opportunities. However, I also realize that there are times when a hard decision may need to be made and a leader has to be willing to assess the situation, make that decision, and live with that choice. Again, I feel blessed that my fellow executive committee members will provide me with the knowledge and guidance I need to succeed.

Gleason: What is first on your agenda as you settle into your new role?

SCHMIDT: One of my very first agenda items was to select committee chairs for the organization. I believe these choices are critical in determining the direction and sustaining the pulse of NAADAC. The committees need to be active and have strong leadership and specific goals. We are a big organization and represent a vast array of addiction treatment professionals across a wide spectrum of care, and need to use the knowledge of these individuals to guide the different committees in doing the work of the profession we represent.

Gleason: What other goals do you hope to achieve during your term as NAADAC President? Is there an initiative you are excited to tackle during your presidency?

SCHMIDT: When considering the ever expanding demand for substance use disorder treatment across the United States, another goal of mine is to grow the workforce. This includes working to obtain increased salaries at all levels, tuition reimbursement, and direct marketing of counseling professionals. If we are going to maintain the unique talents and knowledge that is needed for our profession to be successful, then we are going to have to ensure that we continue to try and attract the most qualified professionals.

Another goal would be to increase advocacy efforts at the national, state and local levels. We all need to have a louder voice in this process so that increased funding, access to care, and implementation of all the rules and regulations regarding parity for treatment are enforced and fair, and that equal care is available to those afflicted with this disease.

I am excited to work toward obtaining more active involvement by the membership in pushing our agenda forward at all levels. We have a responsibility to those we serve to not just be as educated as possible and current in the treatment we provide, but also to support recovery at all levels. We can encourage our members to be active within their local communities in awareness events, support local treatment programs, encourage anonymous fellowship meetings in these communities, and enlist and support mentors in recovery. I strongly encourage member engagement in all areas related to the profession. We can no longer sit back and assume someone else will do it for us. If we do not promote the need to loudly and clearly advocate

that trained, certified and licensed substance use disorder professionals are the most qualified and ethically responsible group of professionals to treat this disorder, then we will abdicate it to the other treatment disciplines.

Gleason: What are you hearing from members as their biggest concerns and challenges for the industry today and how can NAADAC support them?

SCHMIDT: Three important words: parity, parity, parity! For more than 20 years, this has been the clear and most vocal cry coming from members practicing across the United States. We have carried this message to Capitol Hill and have continued to voice our concerns to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), its Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), and other funding entities within the addiction arena. Our message has been that we want parity for care, parity for pay, and parity for coverage. Legislation alone is not enough; we have to be vocal about the ongoing disparity and prejudice against treatment inclusion.

Gleason: What do you feel are one or two of the biggest challenges facing new addiction counselors today, and do you have any advice for overcoming these challenges?

SCHMIDT: Achieving inclusion into mainstream care equal to mental health and primary care is one of the biggest challenges new addiction counselors — and experienced addiction counselors — face today. Accessing funds for continuing education and earning equal pay are also big challenges. New professionals coming into the profession need to be vocal, patient, and tireless in their efforts to work with a population of clients that often have very limited resources and support systems to encourage their long term recovery. I encourage “newbies” to find a mentor who has a history of providing treatment and glean from him or her and his or her experiences and incorporate those components in their own practices. New addiction counselors should have a constant hunger for new and innovative treatment approaches and always, always remember the road to recovery is different for each and every individual we encounter in treatment.

Gleason: Why is NAADAC membership important for addiction professionals?

SCHMIDT: NAADAC is important primarily because it connects members to other treatment professionals across the United States and offers a wide variety of educational opportunities for members to grow and expand their knowledge, skills and abilities. One of the most valuable resources NAADAC offers is the connection to over 10,000 substance use disorder treatment professionals all working in very similar capacities across the world in an effort to improve the lives of those so devastated by their own involvement in the disease. NAADAC also offers professional support, treatment practice insurance, a collective advocacy voice, and educational mentoring possibilities. Finally, the conferences, as well as web-based educational opportunities, are invaluable in this time where funds for training are shrinking.



Jessica Gleason is Director of Communications for NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals. She manages all communications, marketing, public relations, and informational activities of the Association, the NAADAC website, and all digital media, marketing, and communications. Gleason is the Managing Editor for NAADAC's Advances in Addiction & Recovery magazine, and oversees the publication of NAADAC's two digital publications, the bi-weekly Addiction & Recovery eNews and weekly Professional eUpdate. Gleason holds a Juris Doctorate from Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, MA and a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in Amherst, MA.