

NCC AP Update: Moving Forward to Support Our Field

By James “Kansas” Cafferty, LMFT, MAC, NCAAC, NCC AP Chair

Hello to everyone in NAADAC-land. This is the first time I am writing this column, and what a time to do it. We are all concerned about everything from our health, the health of our clients, and the health of our families, to the health of our national economy and possibly even our own personal economic security. In some ways, the world has gotten a lot smaller, as many of us have spent well over a month rarely, if ever, leaving our homes. In other ways, the world has become much larger as most of us quickly adopted videoconferencing and telehealth. Many treatment centers have temporarily suspended all in-person services, while others are continuing to see clients as needed, and the vast majority of private practitioners have switched entirely to a telehealth platform as well.

With this backdrop, I am starting my relationship with all of you as the new Chair of the National Certification Commission of Addiction Professionals (NCC AP). While making this introduction and continuing on with our work seems, on some levels, inconsequential, the fact is that those of us who are members of NAADAC – addiction professionals – are essential to another cause that cannot be forgotten. Across the country, millions of individuals are living with and often struggling with addiction that is continuing despite, and often being exasperated by, the ongoing pandemic. We are still here for them and are unwavering. It is with this attitude that I hope to serve our beloved field, and you, if you are amongst us.

With all of this said, I need to say thank you to our outgoing NCC AP Chair, Jerry Jenkins. I have rarely met a committee I didn’t join, and I am not sure I’ve ever seen a more steadfast and hard-working leader than Jerry. While I will try, I already know that I will rarely meet his example during my tenure in this role. During his time as our Chair, NCC AP has put in vast amounts of work on behalf of the clients we serve and the counselors in our field. We have completed an exhaustive job task analysis of the substance use disorder counseling profession at the Associates, Bachelors, and Graduate levels of credentialing and we have completed the revisions and updates of all three of NCC AP’s core examinations, which are now entering into the final beta testing phase. If any of you were just thinking that it sounds like NCC AP has the most current ability in the world to test the competency of those entering our field, your thoughts were right on target, and while the commission has been working tirelessly on this update, we have Jerry’s leadership to thank for the completion of it. He is truly a class act and I hope that you will thank him for what he has done when you see him. The ripple effect that this update will have on the quality of services we provide will be impactful for an entire generation of clients and counselors.

Many of you have been following the national movement to accept peers as a part of the continuum of care. While some are still fearful of this credential becoming a “lower cost replacement” for counselors, we are consistently finding that this is not the case. NCC AP’s National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist credential is quickly becoming the national standard for what an appropriate scope of practice for a

recovery coach or peer ought to be, up to and including working for an agency, and under the supervision of a credentialed counselor. We are finding that areas that adopt policy around the use of credentialed peers are ending the “wild west” era of substance use disorder treatment by providing an appropriate title, set of qualifications, and scope of practice for these well-meaning entry level paraprofessionals. Most importantly, we have evidence that incorporating Peers into the continuum of cares works!

In closing, it is my honor to serve you and to serve the clients we hope to support. I am a person in long-term recovery since adolescence who has been in this field since my adolescence. It is my life’s work to be in this field, and it is my hope we can continue to inspire new counselors to take on a similar attitude and properly equip them with all of the tools they need to influence their clients and their colleagues. At last, I would also like to wish to all of you a warm, digital embrace. Remember back when we could hug a friend? A co-worker? A client? Those days and those hugs will return because the love has never left.



James “Kansas” Cafferty, LMFT, MAC, NCAAC, has been in the field of substance use disorder treatment since 1997. He has worked in private practice, IOP/ PHP, residential, hospital, and eating disorder specific treatment centers. He has provided training internationally on trauma informed care and nationally on subjects ranging from adolescent care to intervening on impaired professionals. He has been involved with NAADAC for well over a decade, joining originally to advance the National Certified Adolescent Addiction Counselor credential.

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