Forum underlines need for addiction treatment professionals

By TAYLOR STUCK. Apr 26, 2017 Updated Apr 26, 2017. (8)

HUNTINGTON - In order to have more treatment options for those ready to enter long-term recovery, there must be qualified behavioral health specialists ready to assist people in their journey.

Marshall University on Tuesday joined forces with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the National Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors (NAADAC), the Association for Addiction Professionals and the West Virginia Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities in the Department of Health and Human Resources to host a collegiate Workforce Forum to encourage college students to enter into the addiction and mental health workforce.

There are more than 95,000 professionals working in addiction-focused fields, and that number is predicted to continue to expand. The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects the workforce to grow 22 percent by 2024.

Still, there is a national shortage of behavioral health professionals, said Patricia Ploover, president of the West Virginia Association of Alcohol and Drug Counselors.

"I find that incredible, because nationally this is such an epidemic status and at a state level we are at the highest rate of deaths from overdose," Ploover said. "I think there's still a lot of work to be done and a lot of work to be done to find the people who are helping people heal and helping them find the courage to heal. You would need some empathy and also education is helpful, and advised. But really the only requirement is you're breathing oxygen. So if you're breathing oxygen and have any of the qualities I mentioned, you would be perfect for this field.""}

The goal of the workforce forum was to expose students to the different aspects of addiction care.

"It's important to have a wide range, from peer recovery coaches to Ph.D.s," said Cynthia Marmo Tuhy, executive director of NAADAC.

Tuhy said there are some barriers to getting more addiction professionals in the field that her organization is working on addressing.

One is that salaries are relatively low when compared to other health fields, though the average is still nearly $46,000. Tuhy said the average also seems to be increasing from year to year.

There are also barriers for those in long-term recovery themselves, particularly if they acquired a listing as a result of active addiction.

Cassandra Chapman, graduate counseling student at Marshall and a person in long-term recovery, said even her experience with vital statistics, this still scares her.

"It's going to make me much more difficult for me to find a place of employment, even though I have all of this relevant experience," Chapman said. "It's going to make me much more difficult for me to find a place of employment, even though I have all of this relevant experience," Chapman said. "It's going to make me much more difficult for me to find a place of employment, even though I have all of this relevant experience," Chapman said. "It's going to make me much more difficult for me to find a place of employment, even though I have all of this relevant experience," Chapman said.

The event Tuesday was live-streamed to the public and there were satellite events at eight other West Virginia colleges and universities.

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