



Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

ADVANCING RECOVERY AND WELLNESS IN TEXAS

Policy Change Requested for Inclusion in Sunset Commission Recommendations Increase Access to Certified Peer Specialist/Recovery Specialist Services

Recovery:

A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their potential

(SAMHSA - Substance Abuse/Mental Health Services Administration)

Refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life despite a disability. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms.

(CMS - Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services)

Goal:

To increase opportunities for recovery for individuals experiencing serious mental health or substance use conditions by expanding access to peer support services.

Recommendation:

Direct DSHS and HHSC to jointly develop a distinct Medicaid state plan service for peer support services, designating certified peer specialists and certified recovery specialists as approved providers. Direct HHSC to develop rules defining peer support services, certified peer specialists and certified recovery specialists. The rules should also specify requirements for peer certification and supervision and any other relevant issues identified by the executive commissioner as necessary to promote health and safety in peer specialist/recovery specialist services. Development of the rules should include input from certified peer specialists, certified recovery specialists and other relevant stakeholders.

Background:

According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), “peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care which consists of a qualified peer support provider who assists individuals with recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders.”¹ According to research sponsored by SAMHSA to assess evidence-based services, “peers are individuals with histories of successfully living with serious mental illness who, in turn support others with serious mental illness.”² Certified peer specialists have

both the lived experience and have achieved the education and examination requirements for certification. Peer support services generally fall into three categories:

1. A distinct set of activities or a curriculum that includes education and the development of coping and problem-solving strategies to facilitate self-management of a person’s mental illness;
2. Activities that are delivered as part of a [recovery] team that may include non-peers (for example, an assertive community treatment team); and
3. Traditional activities that are delivered in a way that is informed by a peer’s personal recovery experience (case management, information and referral, etc.).³

Peer specialists assist individuals experiencing mental illness by helping them focus on recovery, wellness, self-direction, responsibility and independent living. While peer services are not intended to supplant other existing mental health/substance use services, the frequency of other services can be reduced when an individual is supported by a peer, often resulting in lower costs and better outcomes.⁴ The behavioral health service array is not complete unless these services are included. Peer and recovery specialists play a critical role in supporting individuals experiencing mental health/substance use conditions who are working toward recovery.

In the words of one certified peer specialist...

My experience has been that the Peer Specialists are performing recovery oriented care. Peer Specialists work with people individually to:

- * Help them come to an understanding that recovery is possible for them
- * Help them define what recovery means to them
- * Help them establish what recovery goals they want to achieve in the hospital and what recovery goals they want to achieve back in their community
- * Help them identify what measure of recovery capital they already possess (what do they have working for them in their lives that will assist them in maintaining recovery when back home in their community)
- * Help them recognize what level of family/community support they have and identify other possible sources of support
- * Peer Specialists are equipped at connecting with their peers in different ways based on the stage of recovery the person is in
- * Peer Specialists also design and facilitate Recovery Support groups and create a sense of community in these groups and make them a safe place for people to share challenges they are facing in their lives

My opinion is that the Peer Specialists execute high level decision making on a daily basis. Peer Specialist's meet each person where they are in their recovery journey and adapt unique recovery strategies for each individual. The role of the Peer Specialist is quite sophisticated and the position is far beyond a task oriented position.

Some of the specific services provided by peer specialists include: one-to-one support, advocacy, support group facilitation, transportation assistance, assisting in locating community supports, medication monitoring, resource connecting, staff/family/community education, crisis intervention, and coordination of appointments.

Certified peer specialists and recovery specialists are an essential part of the mental health workforce. The “lived experience” of peer specialists is a valuable benefit typically not offered by other mental health providers. Texas, and much of the nation, is experiencing a significant mental health workforce shortage.⁵

Current initiatives to address the mental health needs of Texans are being met head-on with this critical shortage. Expanding access to support services provided by certified peer specialists and recovery specialists is an evidenced-

based strategy for addressing the expanding need for services and the co-occurring shrinking of the mental health workforce.

Current Environment:

Texas has undergone a thoughtful and thorough process to develop certification requirements for mental health peer specialists and substance use recovery specialists. Via Hope is the organization sanctioned by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to certify peer specialists and is jointly funded by DSHS and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health. Substance use recovery specialist certification is provided by Texas Certification Board of Addiction Professionals. There are currently close to 400 certified mental health peer specialists and over 300 certified recovery specialists in Texas. The table below depicts the requirements for each certification.

Table 1: Certification Requirements for Certified Mental Health Peer Specialists and Certified Substance Use Recovery Specialists

Specialty	Training Requirements	Testing Requirements	Supervision Requirements	Continuing Education Requirements
Mental Health Certified Peer Specialist	Complete 40 classroom hours sanctioned by DSHS provided by Via Hope; includes state systems, recovery process, roles of peer support, using your recovery story, trauma informed services, program environments that promote recovery, facilitating recovery dialogues	Required written certification exam	Licensed Professional of the Healing Arts	20 hours of continuing education every two years.
Substance Use Certified Recovery Specialist	Complete the 46 Hour DSHS Recovery Coach training; includes each of the following domains: Advocacy, Mentoring/Education, Recovery /Wellness Support, and Ethical Responsibility	Required written certification exam	Supervision must be provided by an organization’s documented and qualified supervisory staff per job description	Completion of twenty (20) hours of Peer Recovery Support continuing education, including six hours of ethics training.

Source: Department of State Health Services, information request July 2014.

The Problem:

According to the Texas Council of Community Centers, certified peer specialists are currently employed at all 39 local mental health authorities (LMHAs).⁶ Medicaid rules allow peer specialists to be reimbursed for providing mental health rehabilitative services which are currently only provided through the LMHAs. Peer specialists are approved providers of rehab services, but peer support services are not currently a Medicaid reimbursable service. Certified Recovery Coaches for Substance Abuse currently are not allowed to be reimbursed through Medicaid. These restrictions drastically limit the ability of other provider types to hire and be reimbursed for services provided by peer specialists.

A limited number of peer specialists and recovery coaches are employed at several state psychiatric hospitals and recovery centers, but their services are funded through general revenue dollars or other funding sources, again limiting the ability of mental health provider entities from benefiting from this evidence-based service. There are many other settings in which peer support services could help reduce costs and achieve better outcomes for individuals. Prime settings for these services include hospital emergency rooms, integrated health care settings, community clinics, criminal/juvenile justice settings, and more.

Summary

As stated above, CMS has designated peer support services as an evidence-based mental health model of care.⁷ CMS also recognizes that “the experiences of peer support providers, as consumers of mental health and substance use services, can be an important component in a State’s deliver of effective treatment.”⁸ As is the case with many people experiencing different types of crises, people experiencing serious mental illness or substance use conditions are often more willing to listen to and work with someone who understands first-hand what they are experiencing. They are often more willing to seek treatment in a crisis when supported by a peer and are more willing to participate in the management of their mental illness.⁹

According to one study conducted in 2008, peer support services include services to promote hope, socialization, recovery, self-advocacy, development of natural supports and maintenance of community living skills.¹⁰ The inclusion of peer support services in the service array increases the likelihood of recovery which reduces the high costs associated with people cycling through emergency rooms, county and city jails and state mental health facilities.¹¹

Change Needed:

To improve individual outcomes and begin to address the behavioral health workforce shortage in an evidence-based, cost effective way, Texas should develop a distinct Medicaid state plan service for peer support services designating certified peer specialists and certified recovery specialists as approved providers.

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¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (August 2007). State Medicaid Director Letter #07-011.

² Chinman, M., et al. (2013). *Peer support services for individuals with serious mental illness: Assessing the evidence.*

³ Chinman, M., et al. (2013). *Peer support services for individuals with serious mental illness: Assessing the evidence.*

⁴ Velicer, C. (2013). *Mental health peer support: effectiveness and cost-effectiveness.* American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation. Retrieved at http://peersforprogress.org/pfp_idea_exchange/mental-health-peer-support-effective-and-cost-effective

⁵ Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, (2011). *Crisis point: the mental health workforce shortage in Texas.*

⁶ Castle, D., executive director of the Texas Council of Community Centers. Mental health advocate meeting held on June 23, 2014.

⁷ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (August 2007). State Medicaid Director Letter #07-011.

⁸ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (August 2007). State Medicaid Director Letter #07-011.

⁹ Find citation

¹⁰ Landers, G., Zhou, M. *An analysis of relationships among peer support, psychiatric hospitalization, and crisis stabilization.* Community Mental Health Journal 47:106-112, 2011.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Division. (2012). *With peer support, recovery is possible.* SAMHSA News, Vol. 20, No. 3. Retrieved at http://www.samhsa.gov/samhsanewsletter/Volume_20_Number_3/peer_support.aspx