

NOVA Notes

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Parity Becomes A Reality!

Parity In Healthcare Coverage

After a long and difficult effort, parity in insurance coverage for those seeking mental health and addiction treatment is finally a reality. As part of the economic bailout plan, parity will begin officially on October 3, 2009 (or more likely as policies renew in January 2010).

We want to serve our clients better, and we have often heard how insurance coverages have limited appropriate treatments. This has especially been true in the many limitations on inpatient care. While we now have an array of treatment options that did not exist in the past, there are many stories of those who relapsed in large part to shortened treatment stays.

More importantly, we now can fulfill the individualized and personalized treatment plan at all levels of care. No longer is the only option the one driven by profit, and for adolescents no longer is the only

option to begin treatment in outpatient. Hopefully now we will be able to match client need with treatment resources. While outcomes overall have been steadily improving, this development holds the promise of increased treatment success.

Essentially, any healthcare policy must cover mental illness and addiction as it does for all other illnesses. There can no longer be separate requirements or limitations for mental health or addiction treatment. Policies will have to have the same episode and lifetime coverages as for illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, cancers, high blood pressure, obesity, and other similar illnesses.

NOVA is pleased to have been a small part of this effort both at the state and federal levels. (You might recall our request for signatures on our petition in the last newsletter). We are also grateful for all those who worked tirelessly to bring about this monumental change. It was the combined efforts of many that resulted in the parity legislation being passed (in the 11th hour) and signed into law by President Bush. Thank you to colleagues, professionals, consumers, and families for finally making this possible. Our clients will truly benefit.

In this issue...

Parity Becomes A Reality
Alcoholism Pioneer Dies
Help For The Holidays

A Legendary Founder and Advocate In The Drug And Alcohol Field Passes On

For those of us who have been in the field for many years, Betty Koehler was a force to reckon with. She was a strong voice for proper addiction treatment, and especially was an advocate for women.

She was the founder of Crawford House located just north of Princeton in Skillman. An idea that was well ahead of its time, it was clear to Betty that there needed to be continuing care services for women suffering from alcoholism, drug addiction, and related disorders. The work she began continues to help women today as many in the field know how full the halfway house is most of the time. Even with its expansion some years back the demand for its services continues to run high.

It was the overdose death of her son which propelled Betty into the field. Seeing a gap in services for addicts and alcoholics, she began advocating for more halfway houses in New Jersey. The further she did her research the more she realized that while there was a shortage of halfway houses generally in the state, the real acute need was in women's services.

The journey was difficult and never did it go smoothly. Betty not only would need to advocate for the halfway house at the state level, but locally there was a great deal of opposition to having "those people" living next door. (This is

commonly referred to as the "NIMBY" [Not In My Back Yard] syndrome). Betty would not be deterred from what she believed to be a mission of the utmost importance and we are all a little bit better for her efforts. Thanks Betty.

Stressed Out For The Holidays

Whether you are heading home to visit with family or friends, the holidays can be quite stressful. Here are a few suggestions for a safe/sober holiday season:

Stay close to your support network. Get proper rest. Recognize that this time of year may require more effort for recovery. Know your triggers. Don't "overspend." Plan ahead for events. Seek help at the first sign of trouble. Don't become isolated. Watch for depression. Simplify. Practice saying "no." Maintain "an attitude of gratitude." Nurture your "soul." Practice random acts of kindness. Help others when possible. Happy holidays to everyone and thanks for a great year!

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