

Enhancing Consumer-Centered Recovery: Building Programs, Finding Solutions and Expanding Services

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Background and Introduction

“Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation enabling a person with a mental health problem to live a meaningful life in a community of his or her choice while striving to achieve his or her full potential” (SAMHSA 2004).

Recovery is achieved through the 10 fundamental principles established in a consensus statement by more than 110 expert panelists representing mental health consumers, families, providers, advocates, researchers, managed care organizations, state and local public officials, and others (SAMHSA, 2004). The core components of recovery include approaches that support: (1) self-direction, (2) individualized and person-centered interventions, (3) empowerment, (4) a holistic perspective, (5) nonlinear methodologies, (6) a strength-based point of view, (7) peer support, (8) respect, (9) responsibility, and (10) hope.

While recovery involves the empowerment of those who live with mental and substance use conditions to become all-the-way well, the responsibility to promote this lies throughout the continuum of health care and community-based services. This is achieved by fostering the resources that are respectful and responsive to individual needs and preferences, and promote recovery. This includes the provision of available tools and services to help individuals and their families make informed decisions about their care, and support them in their recovery. A consumer-centered recovery approach includes the responsibility to build programs, find solutions, and expand services for those with mental and substance use conditions. Helping individuals to achieve recovery must be the goal of all health care services.

A cornerstone of consumer-centered recovery is the central role of consumers and peer support services throughout all systems of care and health promotion. The lived experience of consumers with mental health and substance use conditions are a valuable resource in the empowerment and support of recovery.

OptumHealth has embraced a commitment to consumer-centered and recovery-oriented programs. This approach requires innovation in all levels of health care and management, and must include partnerships with consumers, provider systems and others that support this goal. This is an ongoing commitment and is constantly evolving as we strive to build resources for those living with mental illnesses and partner with those who provide services to them. This summary of recent initiatives is intended as a report on progress towards the goals of promoting recovery-focused systems of care. It can serve as a model for consumer-run organizations, managed care systems, and clinical service providers to illustrate how recovery systems can be designed, built, and incorporated into routine practice.

The Role of Peer Support in Health Care and Recovery

The role and effectiveness of peer support services has been well demonstrated in both chronic disease management for medical conditions and in recovery for those with mental and substance use conditions. For chronic disease management the Diabetes Self Management Program (DSMP) (Lorig, et al., 2009) has been found effective for improving patients' health activation, hypoglycemia, physician communications and interactions, improved diet and lifestyle, and reducing symptoms of depression. Other examples abound throughout health care, and for patients being treated for cancer, peer supports have been found to help address isolation, consolidation of information, and the enablement of empowerment (Power, Hegarty, 2010).

In behavioral health care, Peer Support Specialists have an active role in the recovery process. The range of services they provide includes independent peer support, case management, peer wellness coaching, education and advocacy, and as active participants on treatment teams in a full range of clinical settings (Salzer, et al., 2010). In provider settings Peer Support Specialists are able to promote recovery; enhance hope and social networking through role modeling and activation; and supplement existing treatment with education, empowerment, and aid in system navigation (Chinman, et al., 2006). Peer support also fosters whole health coordination linking both physical and mental health. The Health and Recovery Program (HARP), an adaptation of the Diabetes Self Management Program (DSMP), has shown peer support as an effective tool for helping mental health consumers to become improved managers of their chronic illnesses (Druss, et al., 2010). Outcomes from HARP have demonstrated improvements in physical health related quality of life, physical activity, and medication adherence.

Consumer-run organizations that provide Peer Support Services have been successful at promoting community integration, improving daily living activities, and lowering symptom distress (Yanos, et al., 2001). When consumer-run Peer Support Services are paired with traditional community mental health center care, the combined services promote better recovery outcomes (Segal, 2010). The evidence supports that consumers who provide Peer Support Service can be a valuable resource in the promoting and enhancing recovery.

Adopting a Consumer-Centered Recovery Approach

Throughout the spectrum of behavioral health care services and community-based resources there is variable commitment to the goal of recovery for those who live with mental and substance use conditions. Despite the existence of an evidence base for peer support in medical and behavioral health promotion, not all systems of care have embraced these principles. OptumHealth has made a fundamental commitment to its responsibility to foster and provide consumer-centered recovery resources.

This commitment is achieved through an ecosystems approach to support recovery initiatives and resources at the individual, community, provider systems, and whole health integration levels. These four key initiative areas are outlined in Figure 1.

Consumer empowerment is achieved both within OptumHealth's programs and across all levels of community-based resources that promote peer services and recovery-oriented systems of care. To achieve this OptumHealth recognizes the importance and necessity for partnerships and collaborations that support these goals. Some examples, presented here, showcase projects and programs that demonstrate this commitment. OptumHealth is indebted to our partners and collaborators in this journey and encourages the adoption of the goal of consumer empowerment and consumer-centered recovery for all areas of mental health and substance abuse care.

Partnering with Individuals and Families to Empower Recovery

The experience of consumers and families has been described as the "True North" that should guide all health care (Berwick, 2002). All care should be responsive and respectful to the needs of consumers and their families (IOM, 2001). This approach must be adopted throughout all health care operations.

The development of consumer-centered educational resources helps to promote personal empowerment and supports recovery. Information and education are vital components for consumers to become active participants in the development of recovery goals and

plans. OptumHealth is committed to both developing and providing these tools for consumers. Electronic, print and other mediums are effective resources for consumer-centered materials and tools, and must be broadly available.

A web-based blog has been established that provides a forum for consumer perspectives (see: <http://psblog.optumhealth.com/>). This site has been created to use consumer based research findings to articulate the consumer voice. Materials are written by consumers, professionals, and others to describe and disseminate the principles of consumer-centered recovery. In addition, a series of recovery-based videos are being developed by consumers to help their peers answer common questions about diagnosis, treatment and recovery, and to provide hope and inspiration.

In New Mexico, OptumHealth has partnered with the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) to employ consumers in the development and writing of consumer-centric and recovery-oriented materials. This state-based website provides a vast array of information and educational content that is culturally sensitive and written at a broadly accessible level. In addition, the NM Recovery and Resilience team has arranged for specific books and materials to be available in public and pueblo libraries and other locations across the state. Meeting the needs of consumers and their families requires providing materials in their own communities, and in ways that are convenient and helpful, and supports their empowerment and recovery.

Peers can provide the unique perspective of the lived experience of mental illness and peer support groups foster consumer empowerment and the development of recovery goals. In Texas, OptumHealth has partnered with a local consumer organization to develop a database of over 2,000 support groups. This database includes the broad spectrum of available peer support groups from mental health to diabetes to grief to cancer support. This database provides OptumHealth's Care Advocates the tools to encourage and direct consumers to local support groups. Participation in support groups has been found to promote recovery through better adherence to treatment goals and a reduction in adverse events.

Figure 1



In New Mexico OptumHealth employs 17 peer and family support specialists in our regional offices statewide. They are part of the care coordination teams and work closely with care coordinators in providing direct support and referral services to members. Peer support must be an integral part of care coordination and this is a pioneering effort that has raised the level of awareness of recovery within both the organization and the community. OptumHealth is modeling to providers, the community, and to the state that consumers are integral components of the mental health workforce. This approach promoting recovery and empowerment has also fostered the creation of new and self sustaining support groups.

Person centered recovery begins with the recognition that an individual must direct his or her own recovery. Resources that support this goal must be responsive and respectful to individualized needs and preferences. Making resources and tools available to consumers when they want them, where they want them, and in forms that support their use, is key to fostering recovery.

Partnering with Communities to Improve Awareness and Support Recovery

A public health approach recognizes the role of communities in promoting health and supporting wellness activities. The public's awareness of issues related to mental illness is limited, and stigma can be a barrier to consumer-centered recovery. Partnering with organizations and initiatives that promote the public's understanding of mental and substance use conditions also supports recovery.

OptumHealth has made a commitment to foster the public awareness of issues confronting those with mental illness and substance use conditions. Partnerships with community-based resources support those individuals and their family members who live these conditions. This approach challenges us to find new ways to collaborate with both individuals and the consumer community as a whole. To meet this goal a number of initiatives have been launched.

OptumHealth is supporting the National Memorial of Recovered Dignity which is to be located on the grounds of Saint Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC. The memorial honors consumers who died and were buried at state hospitals in unmarked or unnamed graves across the country (for more information see: www.memorialofrecovereddignity.org). For too many years, those who lived and died in state mental hospitals were buried in cemeteries with unmarked and unrecognized graves. As the lead contributor to the memorial, OptumHealth recognizes the importance of demonstrating our commitment that those who have lived with mental health conditions must be respected and recognized. In support of this project OptumHealth has created two traveling exhibits that are provided at no expense to consumer conferences. Increased public awareness of mental illness will lessen stigma and foster recovery.

Peer-based services recognize the vital experience of those who live with mental illness to serve in roles that help others in the development and realization of recovery goals. In collaboration with The Carter Center in Atlanta, the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), Appalachian Consulting Group, the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), and others, OptumHealth has supported the initiative Pillars of Peer Support Services to bring together state leaders from states that have developed reimbursement models for peer support services. This has identified best practices in peer support and the use of certified Peer Support Specialists in Medicaid reimbursed services. Twenty-five pillars were developed by the participants to provide a framework for the development, implementation, billing and reimbursement for peer support services. A white paper was developed that outlines the pillars and the findings from this initiative (www.pillarsofpeersupport.org). A second phase of this project has also been launched to support other states that do not currently have Medicaid-reimbursed peer support services. The Pillars of Peer Support framework helps enhance the role of peer support in consumer-centered recovery and fosters a network of providers that can assist in this goal.

As a part of OptumHealth's commitment to consumer-centered empowerment and recovery, all organizational systems must be respectful and responsive to the needs of consumers. This must be achieved at all levels of the organization. This is accomplished through the hiring of consumers, and universally fostering their input. In addition, organizational training, policies and strategies must be aligned to promote consumer-centered empowerment and to foster recovery.

Partnering with Consumer-Run Organizations and Provider Systems to Promote Recovery

The treatment of mental health and substance use conditions requires a full continuum of services. This includes the various levels of care and a range of clinical service providers. Evidence suggests that treatment teams that include consumers in peer support roles can be more effective than traditional services (Segal, 2010). Consumer-run organizations have also been demonstrated to be effective resources in the full continuum of services that promote recovery (Yanos, et al., 2001, and Cook, et al., 2009).

A Peer Bridger program has been developed and implemented in Wisconsin, Tennessee, Washington State, Texas, Arizona, and New York. Consumers who are in the hospital or recently discharged are connected with a peer in recovery. The goal of this program is to help create a safe and effective transition for consumers as they transition across different levels of care. In this program, the Peer Support resources are available for six months and have the principal goals of helping engage in support groups, develop a set of recovery goals, and establish a Wellness Recovery Action Plan

(WRAP). By expanding the spectrum of resources available to consumers, recovery is promoted and outcomes are improved.

Traditionally, it has been difficult for consumer-run organizations to contract with managed care payers. This is due to a lack of organizational development to meet the full contracting standards. Recognizing that there is a shortage of consumer-run organizations that are available to managed care companies, OptumHealth has developed a public-private partnership with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The project, Helping Consumer and Family Groups Learn How to Become Part of a Managed Care Network, is designed to provide technical assistance resources for consumer led organizations. OptumHealth has committed to helping consumer-run organizations gain access into managed care networks and develop secure funding opportunities. A toolkit and training programs provide this technical assistance. As an example of the success of this program, the Tennessee Mental Health Consumers' Association has been able to become a provider for OptumHealth as a result of their work in the Peer Bridger program.

The OptumHealth Public Sector team in Pierce County, WA has created a person-centered crisis respite program, the Recovery Response Center, in partnership with Recovery Innovations, a recovery-based organization that provides services in five states and New Zealand. This program uses Peer Specialists working on an integrated team with other mental health professionals to offer support, mental health treatment and overnight stays for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis. It features a welcoming, no-force-first "living room" type environment and expands the full continuum of services that are available to support recovery." Recognizing the importance of a full spectrum of services, OptumHealth collaborated with PEOPLE, Inc.'s Rose House, and nationally recognized consumer-run respite program (see: <http://projectstoempower.org/RoseHouse.asp>). Based on their organizational experience, OptumHealth has funded the development of a training manual for how to replicate the Rose House model. This orientation guide is tailored for consumer-run organizations and fosters the goal of including consumer-run programs in the network of care. Pierce County, WA also supports a Family Organization that provides Parent Partners or Family Support Specialists, a specialized children's crisis team, and other family support specialists to help families navigate the systems.

Services that provide peer support to adults in the mental health system have been largely absent from the scope of available clinical resources. In Rhode Island, the Peer-Assisted Health Initiative (PAHI) model has been developed and expanded in partnership with Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) to provide peer support for adults with special care needs and chronic conditions. Navigators/Resource Specialists are peers who have lived through similar experiences and are now working to

provide meaningful resources, community connections, encouragement, hope, and a peer-based perspective of unique understanding. Peers help guide and direct individuals through the many systems that they encounter in the mental health systems of care. One full-time peer has been embedded within a large primary clinic and specialty care clinic at Rhode Island Hospital, and provides a unique resource for adults with special care needs. By expanding the range of available services, peer support can serve as an effective tool to foster and promote recovery. This peer-based recovery model has the potential to expand, and can serve as a framework for other programs.

Creating innovative solutions through key partnerships with consumer led organizations broaden the spectrum of available services that support recovery. Working with consumer led organizations to help them join managed care networks supports their mission and sustain their operations. These programs offer valuable services to consumers who seek care that is recovery-focused.

Partnering with Systems of Care to Foster a Whole Health Approach to Recovery

While mental health care has traditionally focused on symptom management, consumer-centered recovery requires a different approach. It is important to develop and provide resources that are focused on comprehensive health and full recovery. The difference between symptom management and recovery is helping the consumer to become all-the-way well. This mandates attention to both the mental and physical aspects of health.

There is increasing evidence that persons with mental illnesses die prematurely when compared with the general public (Colton and Manderscheid, 2006; Parks et al., 2006). People who have mental health conditions often have other physical health problems that are a significant contributor to these increased health risks. In order to address this, OptumHealth has partnered with NAMI (www.nami.org) to develop the Hearts and Minds program. This innovative program helps consumers learn about the increased health risk factors for people with mental illnesses. Some of the key areas in this program address smoking, obesity and elevated cholesterol, hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. Through this program, participants are able to learn how to establish new healthy lifestyle goals and the program gives them the available resources to achieve their goals.

Similar programs have been developed by OptumHealth to promote consumer-centered recovery that is focused on the whole person and all aspects of their health. The Stanford Chronic Care Self Help Model (Lorig, et al., 2009) has shown effectiveness in helping those with chronic conditions to better care for themselves and their illnesses. In Kansas, the Chronic Care Peer to Peer Initiative utilizes the Stanford Model to help increase the self-care goals

and practices, for mental health consumers. This promising practice is being developed utilizing the HARP (Druss, et al., 2010) program. The HARP program teaches consumers to better communicate with their doctors and helps develop recovery goals that include physical wellness plans, such as diet and exercise. It also identifies the key role of family members in helping to support and realize health goal attainment.

Recently, the concept of peer whole health coaches has been identified as a valuable resource in addressing health concerns for mental health consumers. OptumHealth has adopted the peer support whole health coaching model in New York, Texas, and Arizona. In New York, whole health peer coaches have been made available to consumers to create and implement physical wellness programs. In Arizona, consumer leaders have been trained to provide local peer based wellness coaching programs. In Texas, certified peer specialists are working with consumers in late life to create and work on their whole health wellness goals. These combined efforts support a commitment to the coordination of physical and mental health and the development and provision of resources to attain these goals.

Ultimately, systems of care are improved when there is a full understanding and commitment to the principles of recovery. This includes the network of clinical providers as well as the organizations that manage that care. In Pierce County, WA, OptumHealth has made available resources for providers to help them better understand the principles and process of person-centered recovery. To accomplish this, a curriculum has been developed that offers area providers free courses that are led by consumers. Some of the offerings include Recovery 101 and Trauma Informed Care. The response from providers has been very favorable and this is a model that can be implemented in other areas of the country. OptumHealth is also committed to effectively training all staff to be able to work in a consumer-centered model. To achieve this, a consumer-centered certification for all Care Advocates is being developed. Online courses will allow Care Advocates to participate in training that will be available 24/7. As a part of this certification, volunteer participation at consumer-run organizations will be encouraged and a written competency exam administered. This program will help increase staff's understanding of the lived experience of consumers and foster recovery practices and strategies.

Summary and Conclusions

OptumHealth is committed to the empowerment of the consumer and the promotion of consumer-centered recovery. This can only be accomplished through partnerships that involve a comprehensive range of stakeholders. This strategic approach includes four priority areas: (1) partnering with individuals and families to empower recovery, (2) partnering with communities to improve awareness and support recovery, (3) partnering with consumer-run organizations and provider systems to promote recovery, and (4) partnering with systems of care to foster a whole health approach to recovery.

Examples of how OptumHealth has addressed consumer-centered recovery have been described. These programs illustrate that a commitment to recovery must involve peer support and consumer-centered care across all levels of care. It is strengthened when communities are involved and the needs of individuals living with mental health and substance use conditions are placed at the highest priority. Recovery is a journey that allows one to achieve their full potential and is supported by resources that make it possible.

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