What is recovery?

Livia Davis, MSW, CSWM, Vice President: There is no universal definition of recovery, but essentially, it is a process of change to improve health and wellness and develop a life that is meaningful. Any system, program, organization, community, and family member involved must first and foremost be in the “business of hope.” This means believing that recovery is possible and that there are many pathways to recovery, and committing to defining individualized services and supports.

How can healthcare providers be recovery oriented?

Livia Davis, MSW, CSWM, Vice President: Behavioral health systems are becoming recovery oriented in a myriad of ways by integrating services, treatments, and recovery supports; developing partnerships with the recovery community; promoting person-centered care; and supporting the many pathways to recovery. It’s essential to understand the needs and desires of people you are working with and promote self-determination as a part of the philosophy of care.

An organization needs to undergo a transformation so its values, culture, practices, services, policies, and regulations support recovery. Including peer support workers as part of a multidisciplinary team is a significant step, but it’s about much more than that. It takes time, training, and work.

How is being recovery oriented different from other ways of treating people?

Justine Hanson, Ph.D., Senior Associate: Many healthcare providers have traditionally viewed people experiencing addiction or mental illness as needing to be “fixed.” In a recovery oriented system of care, the person receiving the care is in the driver’s seat, setting goals and priorities for his or her own recovery like improving health, finding a job, maintaining supportive relationships, and securing stable housing.

Can you share a specific example?

Justine Hanson, Ph.D., Senior Associate: In a traditional healthcare setting, a doctor might say—“You need this medication. These are the side effects. Here’s your prescription.” A recovery oriented doctor would help the person understand treatment options. If a medication’s side effects are undesirable or could interfere with recovery goals, the doctor, the person in recovery, and people supporting him or her would collaboratively make decisions about priorities. This is called shared decision making, an important recovery oriented practice that transforms the healthcare encounter.

How do peer support workers help engage people in healthcare?

Matthew Clune, MS, Senior Associate: Peer support workers bring their own lived experience to supplement the clinician’s work. If someone feels like they’re going to die because they can’t stop shooting up, or if they’ve been out on the street because they lost a job, or their husband or wife kicked them out—the odds are that folks with lived experience may be able to engage the individual because their personal experiences ring true.

“A recovery oriented system of care should have all the services and supports a person needs to gain, or regain, a meaningful life. It is about supporting a person to create health as much as responding to illness and preventing disease.”

—Livia Davis, MSW, CSWM, Vice President
“Peer support workers can start a conversation—‘Hey brother or sister, how are you doing? I have been where you are at now, and trust me, you don’t have to live like this. I can show you a few things that might be helpful, a new path that might work for you that is far less painful.’”

—Matthew Clune, MS, Senior Associate

What roles can peer support workers play?

Matthew Clune, MS, Senior Associate: Peer support workers help with all dimensions of life. If someone is struggling in treatment and has cravings to use, a peer worker can provide support and walk him or her through the consequences of leaving treatment. When planning for discharge for someone who wants to get a job, but doesn’t have a driver’s license to get to work, a peer support worker could suggest going to the DMV and support the individual through the steps of getting a license.

What kind of impact can a peer support worker have?

Livia Davis, MSW, CSWM, Vice President: The impact is profound. A person doing well on the path to recovery opens other people’s eyes to what is possible, to the power of recovery, and to the journey to get there.

Steven Samra, MPA, Associate: People like me who are successful in recovery need to be front and center because many people don’t believe we can do it. I can support people who are beginning a journey to recovery by helping them recognize challenges and barriers, and see the great potential for success. For me, modeling my recovery reinforces that I am on the right path and helps lessen my potential for relapse.

What motivates you to do this work?

Steven Samra, MPA, Associate: People who are addicted have very early death rates. Staying in recovery is a matter of life or death for many. I want to share my own recovery experiences. This is who I am, and I need to do this work. It boils down to saving people.

“Recovery is a process, a journey, not a singular event. Many people with addiction have also experienced trauma, homelessness, mental illness, and health challenges. As we move through time in our recovery, we are constantly faced with challenges, and we need to develop skills to succeed. As we build on our recovery, I want people to understand that we are able to adapt, overcome, and adjust.”

—Steven Samra, MPA, Associate

LEARN MORE