

AFTER TREATMENT, AFTERCARE

Recovery can be a new concept to recovering professionals, their families and their colleagues. Sometimes there are misconceptions and fears accompanied by unreasonable expectations of the involved parties. It is important to have patience with recovering individuals and to become familiar with the recovery process in order to be able to give them positive support.

One very important aspect of an ongoing recovery after primary treatment is aftercare, also known as continuing care. Each professional in treatment develops his/her own aftercare plan prior to discharge to ensure a successful recovery. One important component of this plan is weekly in-person attendance at a professionally facilitated aftercare group. Weekly attendance at a professionally facilitated aftercare group provides the recovering professional an opportunity to continue to address primary recovery issues, especially those unique to health service professionals. Weekly attendance also requires personal accountability to the group leader and group members for sobriety and recovery.

Many studies have substantiated the importance of weekly aftercare meetings to success with long-term recovery. Aftercare groups are now available online but in-person programs are recommended by the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program (NE LAP) for health service professionals who need to have the highest level of accountability for their successful recovery.

Ongoing aftercare group attendance can be a measure of the strength of the professional's commitment to recovery. The NE LAP recommends aftercare for a minimum of six months if treatment was an intensive outpatient program and for one year if it was a residential or inpatient program. History has shown that if attendance at (commitment to) weekly aftercare declines, the commitment to recovery declines and the risk for relapse increases.

An established aftercare plan for a health service professional also usually includes regular attendance at AA or NA self-help meetings, counseling and a healthcare professionals 12-Step support group. It is important that the aftercare plan for a health service professional takes into account the unique issues related to public safety, practice demands and personal recovery needs. A well developed aftercare plan provides a clear outline of expected recovery activities and allows for the monitoring for a successful recovery process. Ongoing monitoring of aftercare progress can help the health service professional stay on track with their recovery and ensure a safe and successful practice for the individual, their colleagues and the public.

If you have further questions about the Nebraska Licensee Assistance Program, or feel that you may benefit from assistance from the NE LAP, please contact the NE LAP Coordinator, Judi Leibrock or NE LAP Counselor Tricia Veech, at (800) 851-2336 or (402) 354-8055.

April 2009