MARCH 2025 ISSUE 1

WISPAN WELLNESS

Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurses Quarterly Newsletter

PROVIDING SUPPORT, ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION FOR NURSES

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Nurses Caring for Nurses (NCN) Task Force Launched!

By Kristin Waite-Labott, BSN RN (President and Founder)

Nurses now have a powerful new resource! The Wisconsin Nurses Association (WNA), in partnership with WisPAN, has launched the Nurses Caring for Nurses (NCN) Task Force. This task force is developing a comprehensive online repository of stigma-free resources designed to support nurses facing diverse challenges, including mental health concerns, substance use issues, workplace stress, and career transitions. This initiative addresses the critical need for readily accessible support and is a major step forward in caring for our nurses.

We're also thrilled to announce the launch of the newly redesigned Nurses Caring for Nurses webpage, in partnership with the WNA! WisPAN is prominently featured as a key support resource for nurses in need. This is a huge win for Wisconsin nurses!

Wisconsin Nurses Association

Visit the site and share it widely:
https://www.wisconsinnurses.org/nurses-caring-for-nurses/

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MENTAL WELLNESS PEER SUPPORT CONNECTIONS: NURSE TO NURSE

Every Wednesday, 7-8pm CST
Virtual • Free • Confidential

Open to any nurse or student nurse who would like to connect with other nurses for support in their nursing career. Come to Listen, Share, Learn and Explore.

Contact WisPAN for the meeting link at: wispan2021@gmail.com
Or call: 414.376.7002

SCAN ME!

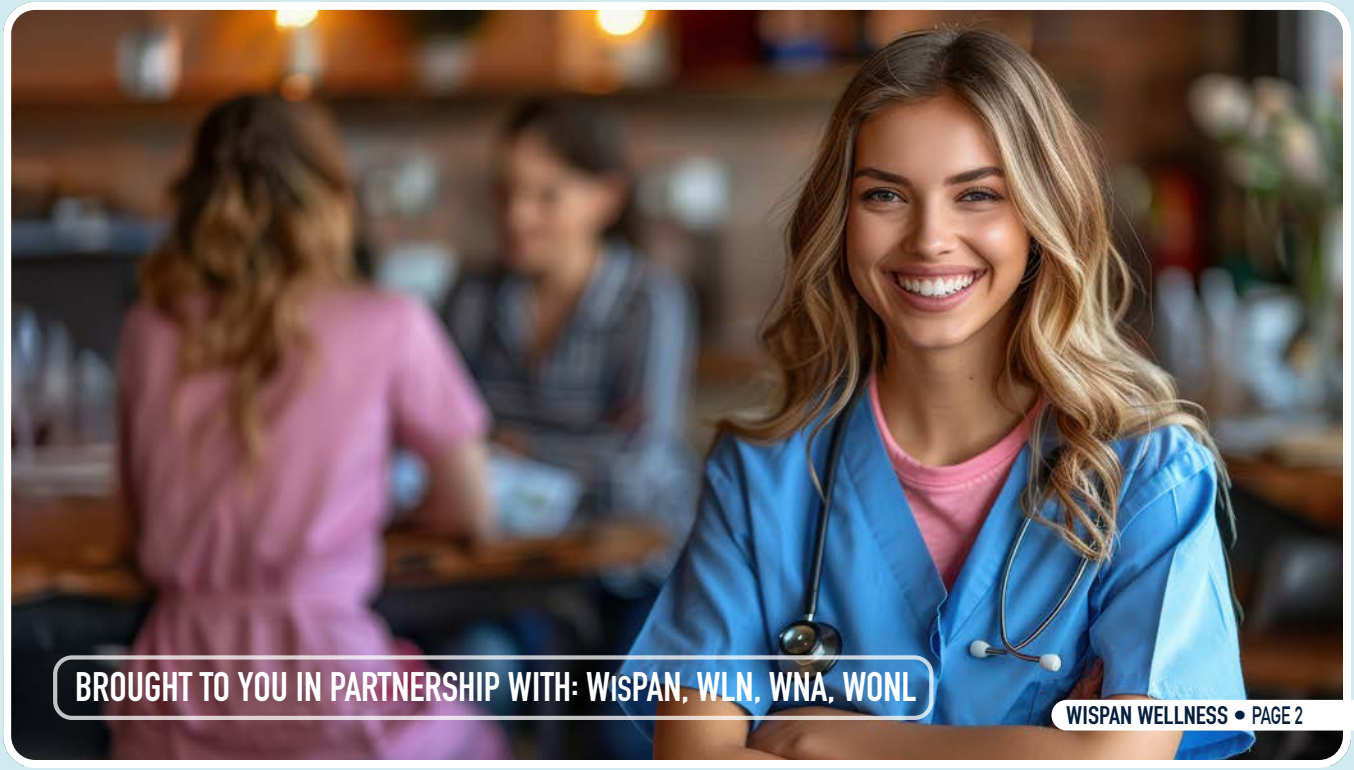
PEER SUPPORT FOR SUBSTANCE USE STILL GOING STRONG!

WisPAN's foundation lies in supporting nurses facing substance use challenges and navigating monitoring programs. We've been here since September 2021, offering a safe and confidential space for recovery and growth.

WisPAN Substance Use Peer Support Meetings are held every 1st & 3rd Monday at 12pm cst, and every Tuesday and Thursday at 7pm cst. Just email us for the link! wispan2021@gmail.com

WisPAN is Growing!

Let's work together to create a stronger support system for nurses. Please take a moment to share your thoughts on what support you would find meaningful through this survey. We want to hear from you as an individual and as a nurse!



IN MEMORIUM

Marie Manthey, a Creator of the Primary Nursing Model of Care

By Kristin Waite-Labott, BSN RN (President and Founder)

Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurses, or WisPAN, would not be what it is today without Marie Manthey. She and I met while presenting a webinar on Substance Use Disorder and Burnout in Nurses together in 2021. During the planning of this webinar, I learned that Marie had started a peer support program for nurses with substance use issues in Minnesota in 2015. Having gone through so much due to my substance use disorder, and knowing how powerful peer support can be, I asked her if she would help me start a similar program in her neighboring state, Wisconsin. She didn't hesitate and readily agreed. She and I met frequently as she guided me. The instruction she gave me was instrumental in starting WisPAN and the care she showed me was a wonderful model for me to follow as I cared for other nurses.

I will miss my mentor and friend, but I know she will live on in each nurse I speak with, show compassion to, and guide through what can be such an overwhelming and difficult process. Marie will be remembered as an amazing leader and for the beautiful compassion she shared with each and every nurse she came in contact with.

WisPAN EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATIONS AVAILABLE

WisPAN's educational presentations offer 1 hour of continuing education credit for attendees, both virtual and in-person.

WisPAN is dedicated to creating a safer health-care environment by addressing substance use disorder (SUD) and promoting nurse well-being. Our educational presentations offer valuable insights into SUD prevention, early intervention, and mental health strategies. By recognizing and addressing the root causes of SUD, such as anxiety and depression, we can empower nurses to build resilience and prioritize their mental health.

While nursing is inherently stressful, we can take proactive steps to manage stress and prevent burnout. By raising awareness about mental health and substance use disorder, and providing access to support resources, we empower nurses to prioritize their well-being.

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

- Recognizing the signs and symptoms of SUD and diversion in nursing
- Realize the resources available for nurses.
- How to support colleagues on their path to recovery and mental wellness.

TOGETHER, WE CAN CREATE A SAFER AND MORE SUPPORTIVE HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENT.

Visit our website at:
https://wipeeralliance.org/contact/
Or email us at:
wispan2021@gmail.com to learn more.

NALOXONE SAVES LIVES

WisPAN is now a Naloxone Direct Program vendor!

This means that we can distribute Naloxone nasal spray at all of our in-person events—Presentations, Exhibits, and Special Trainings.

We'll teach you how to recognize an opioid overdose, use Naloxone, and what to do afterward.

LAY

- Check for slowed breathing or unresponsiveness.
- Lay the person on their back and tilt the head up.

SPRAY

- Insert device into either nostril and press plunger firmly.

STAY

- Call 911 immediately and continue to administer doses as needed.

Get yours!
Contact wispan2021@gmail.com to learn how.

FIRST QUARTER 2025 IMPACT

Accomplishments so far

Exciting changes are happening with our Nurse Mental Wellness peer support meetings! We're now offering opportunities for nurses to share their stories of resilience and featuring speakers from wellness resource programs. Have a speaker in mind or a story you'd like to share? Email us at wispan2021@gmail.com.

Support Meetings

Substance Use Disorder:

- 1st & 3rd Monday at 12pm CST
- Tuesday & Thursday at 7pm CST

Mental Wellness:

- Every Wednesday at 7pm CST

- We held 10 education presentations on SUD in nursing!
- We reached 621 people with that education!

- With the support of you, our donors, we held 32 virtual peer support meetings for those with substance use issues and had 307 Nurses attend! That is a 31% increase over the first quarter of 2024!
- We held 13 virtual peer support meetings for nurse mental wellness and had 79 Nurses attend!

We have partnered with the WNA to bring even more support to nurses: http://www.wisconsinnurses.org/nurses-caring-for-nurses/

FEATURED ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

THE SCIENCE OF PEER SUPPORT

By Christopher Wojnar, MSN, APNP, PMHNP-BC

Christopher is a Registered Nurse and board-certified Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) based in Wisconsin. With over a decade of experience in healthcare, including nearly 10 years as a Neuro ICU nurse, Christopher is a passionate advocate for mental health, suicide prevention, and workplace well-being. He is the founder and CEO of Empowered Psychiatric Solutions, where he combines lived experience, clinical expertise, and innovative strategies to foster resilience and reduce stigma. As an international speaker, consultant, and published author, Christopher is dedicated to empowering healthcare professionals and creating systemic change to support their mental health.

In the fast-paced and high-stress environments of healthcare, mental health challenges are a growing concern, particularly for nurses and other caregivers. Amid this reality, peer support has emerged as a powerful, evidence-based intervention for fostering resilience, enhancing mental well-being, and mitigating the effects of stress and burnout. But what makes peer support so effective? The answer lies in its foundation in psychology, neuroscience, and human connection.

What Is Peer Support?

Peer support is a structured system where individuals with shared experiences—whether related to their professional roles, mental health, or recovery journeys—offer each other empathy, validation, and practical assistance. Unlike formal therapy, peer support is often informal, voluntary, and rooted in mutual respect and understanding. This model has gained traction in healthcare, particularly for nurses, as it addresses their unique stressors and provides a safe, non-judgmental space to share experiences.

The Evidence Behind Peer Support

Scientific research provides a robust foundation for the effectiveness of peer support. Below are key findings that demonstrate its value:

1. **Reduction in Isolation**
   Peer support leverages the concept of universality, a term coined by psychiatrist Irvin D. Yalom, which refers to the realization that others share similar struggles (2020). This understanding reduces feelings of isolation and fosters a sense of belonging, both critical for mental well-being.
2. **Emotional Regulation and Stress Reduction**
   Engaging in peer support activates the brain's social bonding systems, releasing oxytocin—the "feel-good" hormone associated with trust and connection. This helps regulate stress and enhances emotional resilience.
3. **Increased Coping Skills**
   Peer groups often share strategies for managing stress, burnout, and anxiety. This exchange of knowledge and lived experience empowers participants with actionable tools to navigate their challenges.
4. **Improved Mental Health Outcomes**
   Studies show that peer support reduces symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD. It also improves overall life satisfaction, making it a critical component of comprehensive mental health care.
5. **Support for Recovery**
   For individuals managing substance use disorders, peer support has been shown to significantly improve recovery outcomes by fostering accountability and providing encouragement.

Key Components of Effective Peer Support

The success of peer support lies in its structure and principles. The following elements are crucial:

1. **Shared Lived Experience:** Authentic connections form when participants share similar challenges, fostering mutual understanding and trust.
2. **Safe, Confidential Spaces:** Confidentiality ensures participants feel comfortable sharing openly.
3. **Empathy and Validation:** Peers provide a level of understanding that is difficult to replicate in other support systems.
4. **Empowerment:** Peer support emphasizes strengths rather than deficits, empowering individuals to take control of their well-being.

Neuroscience of Peer Support

From a neuroscience perspective, peer support engages the brain in ways that enhance mental health:

1. **Social Connection and the Brain:** Humans are wired for connection. Peer support taps into the brain's reward systems, reinforcing positive behaviors and reducing feelings of loneliness, which have been linked to increased stress and poor health outcomes.
2. **Neuroplasticity:** Engaging in supportive conversations can foster neuroplasticity, helping individuals reframe negative thought patterns and build resilience over time.

Peer Support in Practice: The Example of WisPAN

The Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurses (WisPAN) demonstrates the science of peer support in action. WisPAN provides free, confidential virtual meetings where nurses can connect, share experiences, and develop coping strategies. Meetings incorporate evidence-based practices like mindfulness exercises, open discussions, and resource sharing. By combining the principles of peer support with the unique needs of nurses, WisPAN creates a safe, healing environment.

Why Peer Support Matters

Peer support is more than a conversation—it's a proven strategy grounded in science that promotes healing and growth. Its emphasis on connection, shared experience, and mutual empowerment makes it uniquely effective in addressing the challenges of mental health and well-being.

A Call to Action

As healthcare systems continue to address the mental health crisis, integrating peer support programs can provide immediate and lasting benefits. Whether through grassroots initiatives like WisPAN or organizational efforts to prioritize well-being, the time to act is now.

By investing in peer support, we're not just addressing mental health challenges—we're fostering connection, resilience, and hope. Let's continue building a future where no one has to face their struggles alone.

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2. Cohen, C., Pignata, S., Bezak, E., Tie, M., & Childs, J. (2023). Workplace interventions to improve well-being and reduce burnout for nurses, physicians, and allied healthcare professionals: A systematic review. BMJ Open, 13(6), e071203. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2022-071203
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5. Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurses. (n.d.). Peer support for nurses: Addressing the mental health crisis. Retrieved from https://wipeeralliance.org/

SAVE THE DATE
SECOND ANNUAL BENEFIT GALA

Thursday, May 8th
Elm Grove Women's Club

You are cordially invited to our 2nd Annual Fundraising Gala, a magical evening of connection benefiting Wisconsin nurses.

Join us on Thursday May 8th, 2025
5:30 - 8:30 PM

Add this to your calendar and please share this with your family and friends.

Visit: https://wipeeralliance.org/events/

Spring Into Nurse Wellness Gala 2024

Help Us Grow and Support Every Nurse in Need!

Your ideas matter. WisPAN is committed to continuous growth and reaching every nurse who needs support.
If you have ideas on how we can expand our services or resources, please reach out to us at wispan2021@gmail.com.

Spread the word!

Do you know a healthcare organization or academic institution that would benefit from WisPAN's education on substance use disorder in nursing?
We know they all would! Share our information with them and help us reach more nurses.

Join the movement!

Are you a nurse or nursing student seeking support? We're here for you.
Simply email us at wispan2021@gmail.com to inquire about attending a peer support meeting.
Together, we are making a difference. With your help, WisPAN can continue to expand its reach and ensure every nurse in Wisconsin has access to the support they deserve.

Get Social!

The more shares and likes we can get on Facebook & Instagram, the more we will boost WisPAN awareness.
Repost, Comment, and Like posts to gain more involvement and grow our followers!