March 2023

Wisconsin Peer Alliance for Nurses

WisPAN

Wisconsin's peer support organization for nurses with substance use disorder run by nurses in recovery from substance use disorders

President's Corner

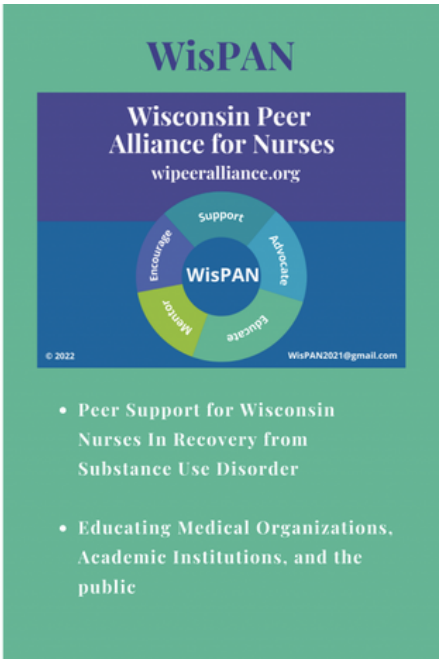
Kristin Waite-Labott

As I reflect back on the last few months, I am humbled by the nurses seeking support through WisPAN and the courage they show in our meetings. It has been incredibly impactful to hear the stories of nurses overcoming difficult issues and lending support to other nurses new to recovery. Because our meetings are confidential, these brave nurses can speak freely with their peers without fear of judgement. This type of open sharing encourages healing and is a beautiful exchange to witness.

The thing that keeps me awake at night is knowing that there are many nurses struggling with the disease of substance use disorder (SUD) in silence. They don't have to suffer in silence, they could reach out to WisPAN, but how do we reach them?

The American Nurses Association has said that 10-15% of nurses suffer with some form of SUD and that 6-8% of nurses are working impaired. Wisconsin has about 100,000 nurses, using those percentages, this means that there are 10-15,000 nurses struggling with SUD and 6-8,000 are working impaired. That is an unfathomable number. We need to reach those nurses and offer them the peer support that can change their life, and maybe even save it, and ensure nurses are practicing safely.

My request of you, my call to action, is to let the nurses you work with, the nurses you manage, the nurses you know, the nurses you care about, let them know about WisPAN. Let them know there is help for nurses with SUD. The disease thrives on silence and can be difficult to identify. Letting ALL nurses know about the support offered by WisPAN will reach those who need it most.



Outreach and Education

One of our goals is to increase awareness on substance use disorder in nursing and to offer solutions. To that end we offer presentations to hospitals, clinics, colleges, universities, and to the public. If you want to join the growing list of those who have benefited from learning about SUD and WisPAN, please contact us today!

Presentations in the last quarter:
- University of Minnesota
- Stoughton Health Leadership
- Carroll University Student Nurses Association
- Winona State University

We reached a total of 142 people including student nurses, staff nurses, and nursing leadership. You never know when a nurse who is struggling with substances will hear the message and decide to make a change.

Can you commit to bringing this message to nurses you know? Help us reach those who need our message the most.

Feedback: “Very informative but more so gives a heart and soul to this issue.”
“This was a wonderful presentation. There were multiple participants that came up at the end of the day and thanked us for having you come and present this information. So valuable to healthcare professionals to have a better understanding, reduce the stigma around substance use and be a support for each other.”
“I really liked how open the presenter was about her story with substance abuse-- it allowed me to really grasp that this could happen to anyone no matter what you have going for you.”

Peer Support Meetings

WisPAN peer support meetings are held virtually via Zoom **every Tuesday and Thursday at 7pm** central time. Meetings are confidential and free. The virtual space allows for nurses from anywhere to join. We even have nurses from other states join us.

Confidentiality enables nurses who are apprehensive about talking in a group setting a safe space to talk to their peers. Each meeting is facilitated by a nurse in recovery. There is a check in and a topic, and sometimes sharing surrounds how to manage participation in a monitoring program, or how to handle job interviews and job searches. We talk about what kinds of jobs can a nurse in recovery practice safely in.

There are too many discussions to share here, but the content is always meaningful and supportive of the nurses we serve. We offer a meeting code at each meeting for those who need confirmation of attendance.
In the last quarter we held 33 meetings. We reach 4-9 nurses per meeting, many of whom return each week.

Be Careful What You Judge

article by Misty, a nurse in recovery

"Before you pass judgment on one who is self-destructing, it's important to remember they usually aren't trying to destroy themselves. They're trying to destroy something inside that doesn't belong."
—JM Storm

What kind of descriptions come to mind when you hear the word addiction? Most of you probably think of various words: scum, jobless, homeless, dirty, stupid. Have you ever thought of words like these when you hear the word "addiction": mother, father, cousin, lost, hopeless, confused? If people could often think of those words instead, then maybe we could decrease the stigma of addiction.

Addiction is one of the most misunderstood and misjudged issues. I look back on my younger years in my nursing career and personal life and see myself as being very judgmental and harsh towards drug addicts and alcoholics. Being able to experience what an addict is feeling is far greater than experiencing the rush of the high; it also involves the deep and sorrowful emotions that the person is feeling. If you could share these feelings and TRY to understand why they want to numb those, then maybe you could forget about the judgment for a few minutes. Instead, perhaps you could be encouraged to show empathy for that person as a human being and find out what you can do to support and help those who are suffering.

"I would NEVER become addicted to drugs and alcohol, and I certainly would never steal drugs from work and risk my career, life, and family."
Up until about eight years ago, this was something that I said internally and out loud daily after growing up with and seeing the despair and destruction firsthand that this lifestyle caused. Like many similar stories, my addiction started with a legal pain-pill prescription.

Those pills gave me energy and a euphoric feeling that was way better than the normal depressed state I had battled with all my life. Unfortunately, those prescriptions got harder and harder to obtain, and I started looking for those medications elsewhere. Then I realized that we wasted a lot of drugs at work.

Therefore, the first time that I used Fentanyl, the intense craving began, along with the insanity. While those who haven't experienced substance use disorders in their lives (either personally or through a loved one) loudly express distaste towards the disease, it's the addicts who suffer. The stigma surrounding addiction is one of the biggest reasons why so many suffering addicts stay silent about their problems, especially us nurses hiding in the shadows of intense shame. We feel less than normal... less than human. Instead of seeking help, we are forced into silent suffering. This is definitely how I felt in the depth of my addiction. I was doing things that were not within my moral compass, and the fear of being judged and stigmatized kept me silent and so SICK. I knew I needed help to stop using the drugs, but I also knew that if I asked for that help, I would commit "career suicide."

I wish that everyone could remember that addicts are human. No one wants to become addicted. It's nobody's lifelong dream to be an addict. We do not aspire to hurt ourselves or the people we love. However, we cannot get well on our own. We NEED other people's love, support, and compassion to make it through the next day without using chemicals or substances.

'If you judge people, you don't have time to love them." — Mother Teresa