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MISSION STATEMENT

SPAN's mission is to be the resource for New York State nurses affected by substance use disorders, while fostering public safety through outreach and education.

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Statewide Peer Assistance for Nurses



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A PIECE OF ADVICE:

**“Never Put The Key
to Your Happiness
in Somebody
Else’s Pocket”**

Information for and about
nurses in recovery

“SPAN”ing New York State

My Journey to Recovery

I count myself among a small percentage of people earning their living doing what they really love. To me the most accurate way of describing how much I love nursing is to say that I would do it even if I didn't get paid. I won't go over the details on how my dream of becoming a nurse came true; I will just say that for me, up to this point, it has been the most difficult thing I have ever done. No wonder one of the happiest days in my life was when I passed the NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination).

I was so fortunate that I did not have to look for a job after passing the NCLEX. When I was in nursing school I did clinical rotations in a hospital that became my dream employer. After starting my clinical, this hospital came to our school to offer clinical assistant internships. Five students were chosen and I was one of them.

My situation could not have been better. I had my dream job and felt that my career was on the right track. I started work after attaining an associate degree and my employer paid for my baccalaureate degree. I worked hard to become an excellent nurse. After 8 years working on a medical/surgical floor, I felt it was time to move on to another specialty, so I transferred to the cardiac intensive care unit (CICU). I was very excited

until my new manager informed me that orientation needed to be on the day shift. Up until then, I had never worked day shift. I asked him if it was possible to complete orientation on the night shift. He said open-heart surgery was done on days and I needed to be exposed to it. Three weeks working on the day shift turned me into a total wreck because of lack of sleep. I tried Benadryl tablets which only made me jumpy while trying to sleep. I could not concentrate or think clearly. My manager promised that after orientation I would be working night shifts. I just wanted to finish orientation and move on.

*I ended up stealing
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I had never in my life used any controlled or illegal drug, not even marijuana. I do not drink because alcoholism is a problem in my family. I do not like taking medications. I was always very healthy, I exercised and had a balanced diet, so the possibility of taking sleeping pills was not an option. My situation got to a point where I could not function anymore; I

just wanted and needed to get some sleep. For some reason I cannot understand, I took fentanyl waste home. When I got home, I injected about 25mcg in my thigh, which resulted in several hours of sound sleep. From that day on, there was no turning back. It became routine as the fentanyl allowed me to sleep. I ended up stealing fentanyl from the PCA pumps on a regular basis and eventually got caught.

I immediately contacted SPAN; surrendered my nursing license, started the Professional Assistance Program (PAP), began Intensive outpatient treatment and started attending Narcotics Anonymous (NA). I was fortunate to find a good sponsor in NA. During my journey I became a better person in all aspects of my life. I took a holistic approach to my recovery. I started going to the gym again, meditating,

yoga, traveling, socializing, enjoying my family, volunteering, eating healthy. I completed the 12 steps. During my recovery I studied and was able to attain two certifications. For the past 2 years I have been working as a home infusion nurse and I love my job. I have been promoted twice. Soon I will be finishing my master's degree.

I have been in sustained recovery for over 3 years now. I have not had any relapses. I feel deeply grateful for all the support I received from SPAN, PAP, NA, the treatment facility, my family and friends, and especially my fiancé, who has been there since day one. I am fortunate to be in New York State where we have PAP, which is the alternative to discipline program. With the support of PAP, I was able to keep my license, recover, and get my life back. I continue to attend NA

meetings and SPAN peer support groups; I still have my sponsor and I am also a sponsor to others.

Knowing that addiction among nurses is huge, I am determined to assist other nurses who are struggling, in any way possible. In 2 years I will be qualified to serve as a group facilitator for SPAN. I see myself being part of the PAP panel at some point as well. I plan to keep up on the current research because I know we have a long way to go helping others in recovery. I have faith that we will find a way to stop losing so many nurses to the disease of addiction. I am convinced that it is possible to overcome addiction, stay sober, get back to work, and support others in need. I am a living example; with faith and support it is possible.

-SPAN participant

20 Years of SPAN Group Facilitation

by Cynthia Kealey

As I reflect on my 20 years as a group facilitator, I feel a range of emotions related to my experience. These vary from pride, gratitude, compassion, to frustration, and sadness.

After 15 years of working as a nurse in critical care and ICU, I saw many of the physical complications of addiction without any of the emotional ones being addressed. In the mid '80's I decided to get credentialed as an alcohol substance abuse counselor (CASAC). A few years later I obtained a master's degree in adult mental health as a nurse practitioner and clinical specialist. After graduation, I began teaching psychiatric nursing at SUNY Stony Brook and eventually developed my own counseling practice.

While working on a detox unit, I began to see a pattern that emerged with nurses in treatment. Many signed out against medical advice because they had to take care of their families and finances before they could devote the time to care for themselves. This seemed to be a major obstacle when following through with aftercare treatment and learning how to support themselves while battling the powerful disease of addiction.

It has been very rewarding to be a part of the support program that SPAN offers to nurses. Nursing has provided me with many wonderful opportunities. Most nurses who develop substance use disorders are very compassionate and empathetic,



but have lost their own identity when they have difficulty saying no to others. Nurses often sacrifice their own needs and have little energy required to build a solid foundation of recovery. I have tried to prioritize and model the balanced

behavior that is necessary to achieve and maintain sobriety one day at a time.

The rewards of seeing so many nurses regain their self-esteem, hope and gratitude, while resolving their shame in the process, has made me feel very proud that I may have played a small part in it. The reality of this disease is that some nurses will relapse but with help and continued support, many will succeed and lead productive lives.

Throughout my 20 years with SPAN I continue to maintain hope and gratitude for this wonderful support program we have for nurses. I urge anyone who is interested in learning more about SPAN to do so. The

Add SPAN Information to Your Automated Medication Dispenser

Addiction is increasingly devastating our communities. Nurses are not immune, with as many as 1 in 5 nurses (Bettinardi-Angres & Bologeorges, 2011) developing a substance use disorder. Nurses often suffer in silence, afraid to ask for the help that they need and deserve. Some are unaware of the supports that are available. Many feel paralyzed by the guilt and shame associated with their addiction.

Stress and easy access to controlled substances are occupational risks which can contribute to this statistic. More specifically, these factors can contribute to a serious symptom of addiction referred to as diversion. Diversion is the action of taking medications away from its intended path and occurs when a nurse takes medication from the workplace for personal use. Diversion requires quick attention to protect the public, the institution and the nurse who is struggling.

In an effort to raise awareness and address diversion at the source, educational information about confidential peer support can be helpful when imbedded on computer screens and automated medication dispensing machines such as Pyxis or Omnicell. Suggested information includes the SPAN logo and confidential 1-800# support line number. A leading teaching hospital in New York State has implemented this strategy as a pilot with the support and encouragement of SPAN staff and your facility can too.

So we ask you...is your organization doing everything it can to prevent diversion, recognize substance use and intervene early? SPAN is a peer support program for all nurses in New York State

impacted by the disease of addiction. SPAN services are free of charge and we are here to help and be a resource for you. SPAN is interested in partnering and exploring how we can be of assistance to your facility or agency. Together, we can be more effective in identifying and helping nurses in need. Read on to see what other agencies are finding helpful and reach out to the SPAN Outreach Coordinator (Becky Eisenhut, MS, RN, CASAC, CARN 315-751-6654) for assistance in implementing any or all of the items below. Together we can build a culture of safety and compassionate intervention.

- **Establish an On-Site SPAN liaison:** Provides employees with an in-house connection to services. A liaison facilitates a direct connection to the SPAN Regional Coordinator. Liaisons are knowledgeable of SPAN resources and have immediate supplies of educational materials.
- **Display SPAN posters as a reminder of our availability.**
- **Embed peer support helpline #'s and logos** in automated medication dispensing systems. Electronic displays of helpline information and SPAN logos on computer screens before nurses access controlled substances can help decrease diversion and link nurses who need support.
- **Presentations for your staff:** SPAN offers free outreach and education with an emphasis on prevention, early identification and intervention. There are several ways to reach out for services before there is patient

harm or licensure issues.

- **Include SPAN in wellness events hosted by your organization.**
- **Encourage wellness practices for all staff:** SPAN offers presentations on nurse wellness and self-care.
- **Yearly required education on addiction & diversion.** Education can focus on the importance of being familiar with philosophy and policies regarding substance use disorders, diversion prevention strategies, regulations and laws that govern these issues.
- **Debriefing support.** When addiction impacts your agency, SPAN is a confidential program of support. We have successfully worked with Human Resource, Nursing and Occupational Health staff to assist in debriefing sessions while providing emotional support regarding addiction related incidents and issues.
- **Use SPAN as a resource for policy development.** SPAN is a free resource for ALL nurses including administration and management. Feel free to contact us for assistance where useful. I.e.; return to work agreements, drug screening policy/reasonable suspicion intervention.

Bettinardi-Angres, K. & Bologeorges, S. (2011). Addressing chemically dependent colleagues. Journal of Nursing Regulation, 2(2), 10-15.

"You wouldn't worry so much about what others think of you if you realized how seldom they do" —Eleanor Roosevelt



STATEWIDE PEER ASSISTANCE FOR NURSES • NYSNA

SUPPORT, ADVOCACY, EDUCATION

155 Washington Avenue, 4th Floor,
Albany NY 12210

Thank you to our SPAN Facilitators

There are over 30 peer support groups in New York State that could not function without our volunteer facilitators. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all 49 group facilitators who show up week after week to ensure SPAN nurses have a supportive environment in which to share their challenges and successes. Our volunteers with milestone anniversaries in 2019 are:

20 years: Cynthia Kealey, South-eastern region (see reflections from Cynthia on page 2);

15 years: Robert Abel, Metropolitan region and Dolores Bradley, South-eastern region;

10 years: Mariann Abrams, Eastern region, Kathleen Heller, Eastern region, and Andrea Turton, Western region;

5 years: Josephine Velleca, South-eastern region

We also welcome 4 new facilitators appointed in 2019:

- **Joanne Liberty, Southeastern region**
- **Robert Manderson, Adirondack region**
- **Giselle Perez, Metropolitan region**
- **Linda Wayne, Metropolitan region**

SPAN Staff

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Eastern NY Regional Coordinator

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Central NY Regional Coordinator

Joyce Nebush, RN, BS, CASAC
Adirondack Regional Coordinator

Michele Schultz, BSN, RN
Western NY Regional Coordinator

Angela Grabowski, CAP-OM
Confidential Assistant to the Director

Sandra Hair
Confidential Office Coordinator

SPAN Support Groups

Adirondack: Canton, Oneonta, Plattsburgh, Utica

Central: Binghamton, Elmira, Syracuse (2), Watertown

Eastern: Albany, Guilderland, Highland, Latham, Middletown, Saratoga Springs

Metropolitan: Bronx, Brooklyn, Elmhurst, Manhattan, Pleasantville

Southeastern: Bohemia, Farmingdale, Massapequa, Riverhead, Selden, Staten Island, Syosset

Western: Batavia, Buffalo, Olean, Rochester, West Seneca

SPAN also offers at least 1 online group per week

For more information, please contact your regional coordinator or the SPAN HELPLine at **1-800-45-SPAN-1** or **1-800-457-7261**.

On the web:

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:
<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/iamrecovery.com>

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services:
www.oasas.ny.gov

New York State Smoker's Quitline:
www.nysmokefree.com/

Gamblers Anonymous:
www.gamblersanonymous.org/

To find an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting: www.aa.org

To find a Narcotics Anonymous meeting: www.na.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence:
www.ncadd.org

Al-Anon or Alateen:
www.al-anonfamilygroups.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI):
www.ncadi.samhsa.gov