

Peer Assistance Program Highlight: Professional Recovery Network

By Donna M. Chamberlain, LCSW, CAS

The Professional Recovery Network (PRN) is pleased to offer its services to the profession of veterinary medicine. In this article you will find a general overview of our services and the process an impaired Veterinary Professional might undertake to access our services. As a department of the Texas Pharmacy Association (TPA), the Professional Recovery Network is one of the many services that TPA provides to healthcare professionals. In addition to being housed at TPA, PRN is also a Texas Dental Association (TDA) sponsored service and has recently been given the opportunity to become a Texas Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) sponsored service as well. PRN operates under the Texas Health and Safety Code, Chapter 467, Peer Assistance Programs.

Several years ago, the state of Texas recognized the need to monitor and provide advocacy services for impaired professionals. Prior to this awareness, if a professional had a mental health or substance-use disorder, they were left with only disciplinary action from their licensing board and no treatment. Leading the path for “non-punitive” rehabilitation, the Professional Recovery Network began providing referrals, monitoring, education and advocacy services to help professionals keep their licenses and continue to practice with integrity and concern for the safety of the public. Monitoring is confidential provided that the participants follow the guidelines in their monitoring agreement. PRN serves two groups of professionals: volunteers and board-ordered participants. Confidentiality is offered to any individual who contacts PRN with a concern about their possible impairment or that of another professional. PRN prides itself in the quality and non-stigmatizing nature of the services provided to the professional community. In addition to career reestablishment, many participants have shared that they’ve experienced a rebirth of their professional, spiritual and family life.

“When I finally admitted I was chemically dependent, I was frightened and felt I had no options left in my life. The PRN program directed me to treatment and educated my supervisors about addiction. The monitoring contract has provided a safety net for which I am grateful.” —Anonymous

“Recovery is a process, a discipline, a lifestyle of positive behaviors and thoughts. The PRN program enhances and supports all of these goals. PRN truly has its focus in supporting and caring for the recovery and long term well-being of its participants.” —Anonymous

Warning Signs of Mental Health and Chemical Impairment

Physical Changes

- Change in appearance and/or poor hygiene
- Frequent shaking and/or sweating
- Change in appetite
- Change in speech patterns
- Change in sleep patterns

Behavioral Changes

- Mood swings
- Loss of memory or blackouts
- Change in social activities
- Extreme temper
- Displaying excessive paranoia, anxiety, depression and/or irritability

Performance Changes

- Disorganization
- Increase in errors

- Increase in customer complaints
- Frequent absences

How to Obtain Help from PRN

If you or another professional has a problem concerning mental health or substance-addiction, call the PRN helpline at 800/727-5152, 24-hours a day. There is also an after-hours number available for emergencies: 512/496-7247.

Is it Confidential?

PRN provides individuals with the means to a confidential recovery. If you call to help for someone in need, your name and location will not be divulged. However, the PRN staff may ask for your name and phone numbers so that we can obtain further information and let you know that action is being taken on the individual's behalf.

Stages of Participation

- **Call PRN:** Calls are made either by a potential participant or by people concerned that a professional has a substance-use disorder or mental impairment.
- **Intervention:** Potentially impaired professionals are contacted by licensed case managers to perform an intervention and determine if the professional has an impairment affecting his or her professional practice.
- **Assessment:** If it appears that the professional has an impairment, a mental health professional is contacted to provide an assessment. This assessment determines whether a problem exists, and if so, makes a treatment recommendation. Treatment recommendations, if followed, may able the participant to continue practicing in the profession.
- **Treatment:** Depending on the professional's needs, inpatient or outpatient treatment may be required.
- **Monitoring:** PRN staff will assist a participant using a variety of methods, including: random urine drug screens, AA journal logs, reports from supervisors, monthly phone calls and progress reports from treatment providers. Regional PRN education meetings and biannual seminars are also available.
- **Advocacy:** If the participant is known by his or her regulatory board, a PRN staff person will be an advocate for the professional before the regulatory board, if requested.
- **Education:** PRN staff will provide opportunities for the participant to learn about mental health and addiction-related issues.

Professional Recovery Network Staff

Donna M. Chamberlain, LCSW, CAS, Program Director, graduated Summa Cum Laude from St. Edward's University with a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work in 1996 followed by immediate acceptance to the Advanced Standing program at The University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work. She graduated with honors and a Master of Science in Social Work in 1998. Donna was licensed as a Clinical Social Worker, Independent Practitioner and Board certified as a Clinical Supervisor in 2006. She is also certified by the Texas Medical Board as an Acudetox Specialist.

Chamberlain has worked for a variety of criminal-justice-based substance abuse programs. The clients participating in these programs were state or federally mandated so the concept of recovery within a structured framework is familiar territory for her. She has worked with a variety of client populations including but not limited to: street dependent youth, prison inmates, and individuals of various other backgrounds. Her experience encompasses working with adults, children and families in both inpatient and outpatient treatment settings. She brings to the PRN a unique combination of strong clinical

experience with clients suffering co-occurring psychiatric and substance-dependence disorders as well as 20 years of administrative experience from her previous career in the public sector.

“The Professional Recovery Network brings together two of the most crucial issues faced by society today: public safety and personal accountability in a world where drug and alcohol use is more devastating than ever before in our country’s history,” said Chamberlain. “PRN allows society’s trusted professionals an opportunity to confront their impairment, seek recovery, protect their licensure, and return to a competent, safe practice which upholds the ideals of the profession. Recovery happens.”

Social Worker Hanna Del Toro, LMSW, joined PRN in October 2009. She earned her Bachelor’s in Sociology and her Master’s in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin. She has worked in various areas such as: divorced family custody issues, teen parents, school-based services, domestic violence, elderly care, psychiatric services, home health and psychotherapy.

Social Worker Courtney Bolin, LMSW, joined the PRN team in June 2008. She earned her Master’s degree in Social Work from Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas and her Bachelor’s degree in Social Work from the University of Texas at Austin. Bolin’s experience involves working with high risk families through the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. She has provided on-going services to families in crisis by offering support and connecting them with resources in an effort to empower them. She also has experience assessing families in the hospital setting and working with various professionals to ensure optimal patient care. She has worked with adults, adolescents and children suffering from mental health disorders, as well as adults and adolescents experiencing substance abuse.

“The PRN program is an opportunity for individuals to face challenges in their life head-on and come out even stronger in the end,” said Bolin “It’s an opportunity for professionals to reclaim a life they’ve worked so hard to build. I believe in the ability to change and am grateful to be a part of a program that fosters that process.”

For more information about the Professional Recovery Network, visit the Texas Pharmacy Association website: www.rxpert.org.