



How the Laborers got involved in Substance Abuse Recovery

LiUNA!

The Laborers' International Union of North America is the most progressive and fastest-growing union of construction workers, and one of the most diverse and effective unions representing public service employees.

Bernie McCann, PhD, CEAP - Cape Cod Symposium on Addictive Disorders, Hyannis MA, 9/2008

Why Laborers' Local 210 got involved in substance abuse & created a MAP

What it was like in Buffalo before the Member Assistance Program:

- ❖ Members had some health insurance coverage for alcoholism, but little support from the Union or Employers for recovery

So Local 210 became interested and requested assistance from the Laborers' Health & Safety Fund to design a Member Assistance Program

- ❖ Employee Assistance Programs were already growing by leaps and bounds in other worksites, so this effort sought to bring these same services to Local 210 members
- ❖ A labor-based MAP operates a little differently from other EAPs
 - Differences in the way health benefits are accumulated
 - Major focus on services to members and families

How Local 210's MAP was created

- ✓ Met with Signatories to reach agreement on joint Labor/Management participation and administration
- ✓ Met with mental health and substance abuse providers to create a treatment provider network
- ✓ Informed membership of new MAP services
- ✓ Informed management/union of Drug Free Workplace Policy and consequences for workers if violated
- ✓ Publicized Substance Abuse Policy to membership
- ✓ Set up drug testing program with providers & medical review officers

Taft-Hartley Multi-employer Plans

- Definition: Taft-Hartley Plans - a multi-employer trust fund established through collective bargaining between labor union(s) and employers.
- Jointly administered with equal labor and management representation for medical care and health-related benefits to covered workers and dependents.
- The vast majority of the unionized Building Trades have Taft Hartley Plan Multi-Employer provided health plans.

Cooperative Labor/Mgmt Approach

- A cooperative labor/management approach is a hallmark of the modern Laborers' Union - strikes or work disruptions are very rare; relationships between the union and building contractors are very positive - this extends to apprenticeship programs, health and safety, and construction development projects.
- What makes them different than private employers?
 - Workers (members) have a personal account from which the fund administrator pays healthcare bills.
 - T-H plan administrators set up a unique network of providers and then negotiate prices and charges.

The Changing Nature of Substance Abuse Treatment

- ❖ 20 years ago, treatment for alcohol & drug abuse was considered "specialty treatment".
- ❖ Almost like plastic surgery is today, it was a treatment system that functioned outside the regular healthcare delivery system; regular doctors were rarely involved; and it looked very different from other medical services.
- ❖ Treatment centers for chemical dependency were largely free standing – and often not connected to other medical facilities.

Rise of Behavioral Managed Care

- Early addiction treatment staff were often recovering individuals with “on the job training” – who got clean and sober, and embraced AA’s 12 steps as a program of recovery.
- Early addiction treatment centers evolved from original “drying out” houses to resembling a private clinic, and private health insurance, largely financed by employers, began to pay for treatment.
- Quickly enough, insurance companies noticed they were paying large sums of money for the same individuals to cycle in and out of 28 day inpatient treatment programs.
- Thus, not unlike the rest of healthcare, managed care came to substance abuse treatment and it became paired with mental health treatment – which we now refer to as managed behavioral healthcare.

And what its like now...

- Today, 95% of those with job-based health insurance get substance abuse benefits from MBHOs. These (largely for profit) MBHOs have a full menu of products to sell to employers and now the public sector.
- One early success of MBHOs was in reducing substance abuse healthcare costs. The primary way they did this was to stop sending everyone to treatment for 28 days.
- ***Did the predictions (and criticisms) of managed care come true?*** Since all plans are not created equal, there is huge variety in managed care providers, some are only interested in reducing costs, others more focused on getting people the right treatment at the right time and at the right price.
- Over time (and from backlash about restrictive managed care practices), the initial cost control successes have faded, and today we are still confronted with large cost increases in all aspects of healthcare, which illustrates how difficult the problem of affordable healthcare really is.

How the Laborers got involved in Managed Behavioral Health

- ❖ In the late 1990s, EAPs were very prominent in US workplaces – especially in larger companies, school systems, state & federal government – and among a growing number of the Laborers' Taft Hartley plans – like Local 210 in Buffalo.
- ❖ Our approach was for the T-F health plans to proactively manage behavioral healthcare by setting up intelligent contracts with MAPs and treatment providers to provide the right level of services, but not allow costs to go out of control and thus endanger the level of member benefits.

What worked

- ❖ By educating and consulting with the various Laborers' health plans to help them find responsible local MAP providers interested in doing good clinical work for a reasonable price, the LHSF brought a lot of health funds into the behavioral managed care arena without reducing the level of benefits to members.
- ❖ And, by working in partnership with health plans in many cases we were able to increase the access and available options that Laborers and their families had to effective substance abuse and mental health treatment.

Current approach to treatment

- ✓ Substance abuse and mental health disorders are not easy issues – for the individual or the family – and can be difficult to resolve. Often people who develop these problems don't know where to turn, don't realize that these are treatable conditions, and don't understand that effective help is available.
- ✓ Sometimes members with substance abuse problems don't seek treatment because they are afraid of missing too much work or that their employer will find out. Instead, they wait until they receive a positive drug test or DWI and their problem begins to affect their livelihood.
- ✓ Just as there are often a variety of treatments for various medical problems, the same is true when it comes to treating a person with alcohol or drug abuse problems.

Continuing to care for members

- One of the great rewards of working with the Laborers' MAPs is watching the continued success these programs are having with these issues.
- The Laborers' MAPs and the Health & Safety Fund are always working with the union locals and employers - - for example, when they have a workplace tragedy, often they are on the worksite the next day, talking to the workers, reminding them to take extra care of themselves, and that if they need somebody to talk to that the MAP is there to listen.

Resources for Labor & Others

- The Laborers' Health & Safety Fund
www.lhsfna.org
- Working Partners for Alcohol & Drug-free Workplace
www.dol.gov/workingpartners
- Labor Assistance Professionals
www.wapeap.com/lap

