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Marriott Conference  
Resort Georgia  
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real help = real hope

OTPG QUARTERLY NOV. 1, 2018

**Message from the President**

By Brook Etherington, MA | President, OTPG



Greetings friends and colleagues!

I welcome you to the 11th annual Opioid Treatment Providers of Georgia conference at our new location in Stone Mountain, Georgia. Our conference theme this year is "Erasing the Stigma of Medication Assisted Treatment and Embracing Treatment and Recovery", and I believe that it is essential for all of us,

professionals, peers, stakeholders, patients and allies, to embrace this message if we're going to continue to fight against and recover from this epidemic.

We invite you to join us and take the opportunity to learn, to network, to develop community. Take advantage of the immense knowledge of your colleagues and our esteemed presenters. OTPG is welcoming back Dr. Merrill Norton as our key note speaker. We're always excited and grateful to have him share his awe-inspiring expertise with our community. Enjoy the conference everyone!

**Brook Etherington, MA | President, OTPG**

**Hepatitis C Treatment in our OTPs:  
Yes, it's Possible!**

By Ali McCorkle and Marie Sutton

Yes, it's possible. After 20+ years of seeing HCV positive patients in our clinics and meeting roadblock after roadblock with screening and linkage, we now have the capability of treating our HCV+ patients in-house. As a long time advocate of HIV and HCV testing in our programs, Hepatitis C treatment itself seemed worlds away. I pursued multiple avenues at my own program to obtain funding for HCV testing over the years, in addition to the numerous times that OTPG has applied for multiple grants for the same purpose. All efforts were unsuccessful, until April 2015, when Imagine Hope entered into a partnership with Gilead Sciences to offer HCV testing in OTP and abstinence-based programs. OTPs that participated in Imagine Hope's HIV testing program were now eligible to provide HCV testing.

We immediately hit the ground running and in the first 3 years of screening, participating OTPs have tested 4,026 patients for HCV with the Imagine Hope/Gilead FOCUS project support. Since the HCV program's inception, we have had 565 HCV Ab+ clients with 70% of those being confirmed as chronically infected. Despite the number of patients who were successful in obtaining outside treatment through specialty clinics, there remained a much larger number of uninsured patients that are still seeking care. There were long waiting lists, transportation difficulties, poor compliance with treatment, lack of motivation, challenges with co-pays and sliding scale fees for necessary lab work and other factors that prevented patients from seeking or following through with medical care. We had many more patients out of care, compared to those receiving HCV treatment. We knew there had to be a better way.

In April of this year, we began treating HCV at the Athens Clinic. We were not the first. The award for pioneering this pilot program goes to Jeanette Loudermilk and Dr. Carl Smith at the Pittard Clinic. They began treating patients in-house, due to an ever-growing group of patients in their rural clinic that had no access to outside medical care. Following

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Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities

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## Hepatitis C Treatment in our OTPs: Yes, it's Possible!

By Ali McCorkle and Marie Sutton

her advice, and after receiving training with Dr. Lesley Miller from the Grady Liver Clinic and Imagine Hope, we began the process of completing our in-house protocol. Not all patients can be treated in our facilities. Some patients are more suited for care with a GI specialist due to advanced cirrhosis or fibrosis. In those cases, we still refer out. For those that meet our protocol, we now treat HCV in-house. As of today, at Athens Clinic, we have 7 patients in various stages of care. Two of those have Sustained Viral Repression (SVR). Jeanette reports that the Pittard Clinic now has 8 patients with SVR and 4 currently receiving direct acting antiretroviral therapy.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** The Gilead Sciences FOCUS program limits its support to testing and linkage to care. FOCUS does not support treatment and remains agnostic in partners' treatment decisions. No Gilead funds were used to support "in-house" HCV treatment. We typically prescribe a pan-genotypic medication to be taken once per day, as this alleviates the need for costly genotype testing. Medications can often be obtained through patient assistance programs. Our patients have reported minimal side effects, none of which interfere with their daily activities. Gone are the days of Interferon and Ribavirin treatment that caused patients to often be bed-ridden for the better part of a year. Newer generation HCV drugs allow patients to work and fully participate in their lives during 12 weeks of treatment, while experiencing much higher rates of Sustained Viral Response. There is a cure for Hepatitis C. We work with a population who are at high risk for HCV, yet are the least likely to be able to access care. Treating HCV "in-house" is a compelling approach to addressing barriers to care. If you are interested in exploring the possibility of offering HCV treatment in your program, I would highly recommend it. This is an enormous opportunity to improve the quality of the lives of our patients. **Please feel free to contact Ali McCorkle at 706-552-0688 or athensclinic@hotmail.com. If you are interested in participating in the Imagine Hope HCV screening project please contact Marie Sutton @ 404-606-1728.**

## A Peer Who CARES

By Riley Kirkpatrick, CARES | Alliance Recovery Center

My name is Riley Kirkpatrick and I'm a person in long term recovery. My drug of choice was heroin, and for me it was Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) that was the final pathway that led me to long term recovery from illicit substances. After being in and out of a multitude of treatment centers and attempting recovery through various pathways, I was unable to put much distance between myself and my last use until I was willing to try MAT as a valid pathway. I was one who was taught that MAT was not "true recovery" from abstinence-based programs, and I was not willing to try this pathway for many years as a result. It wasn't until a doctor, whom I had become close with during my eighth stay at a detox center in Portland Oregon, convinced me to try MAT, that I was willing to try something different. I was quite surprised at first that I was able to put a door stop in the revolving door that had seen me in and out of so many programs. This WORKED for me. I started to recover. And I never could have imagined back then that I could be as high functioning or find as much meaning in my life as I have these last handful of years.

## A Peer Who CARES continued

With my many attempts at treatment, inpatient, outpatient, recovery houses, etc., I had never heard of a "recovery coach" or a "peer specialist." Being from the West Coast, I had no idea that Georgia was leading the nation in treating substance use disorder with these new peer positions. I had always seen and received help from a clinical and medical approach, but a "peer?" What was this? The more that I learned, the more intrigued I became.

I learned all about the Georgia Council on Substance Abuse and how it was made up of people in long term recovery who had put together a training program with a certification called CARES. CARES stands for Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist. This program is only for people in recovery themselves who are wanting to work with others who struggle with substance use disorder. So I applied. After completing the process, the written submission, the interview, etc., I was excited for the week long academy, but even though I had friends fill me in, I still didn't entirely know what to expect. To summarize, the week was incredible. It was a massive crash course in everything from recovery messaging (changing the language we so commonly use around addiction and recovery), to learning how to be vulnerable and effective in my communication with peers. I learned about Motivational Interviewing and Recovery Oriented Systems of Care. I learned about CARES Ethics and what my role in these positions are and are not. Granted, I did not learn everything, that makes me love what I do, in one weeks time. I have been learning about my pathway since I've been in recovery and vowed to learn how to breathe in and breathe out, not shoot heroin in between, and not harm myself from those ways that used to feel like instinct. That is where my deep, hard work has been, but The CARES Academy, the CARES Workshops and CEU's, keep my skills in working with my peers refined and continuously growing. Just as I'm always growing as a person in recovery, I'm also always growing as CARES / CPS.

The intention of these positions is not to be a counselor or a junior counselor. It serves a different purpose entirely, which is what I like so much about it. I am not here to counsel clients or to offer therapy. I am here, essentially, to be taillights to follow. I am here to let them know that recovery is possible, and that addiction is not a death sentence or a chain to hopelessness. I am here to support them in any pathway that feels right and meaningful to them. I am not here to argue which pathway is better or worse than any other. I do not believe that we own a monopoly on recovery. I am here to be a cheerleader, to inspire, to motivate. I will always show how the glass is half full, even when we may feel empty inside. I start groups with "What's right with you today?" And I know that so long as we are breathing, there is hope.

**I would like to encourage anyone to share this information with clients who may be interested in becoming a CARES. They are eligible to apply with two years of continuous recovery from illicit substances. And YES, being on any form of MAT does count as recovery. The CARES Academy in March, (March 25 - 29, 2019) is specifically for people in recovery whose pathway has included, or currently includes, Medication Assisted Treatment.**

**Anyone interested in The CARES Academy can learn about the application process online at [www.gasubstanceabuse.org](http://www.gasubstanceabuse.org).**

## Are You Interested in becoming a peer recovery coach?

By Laree Jones, CARES | MAR/CARES Coordinator  
Georgia Council on Substance Abuse

Georgia Council on Substance Abuse (GCSA) has been administering the Certification Program for CARES (Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialists) since 2010. The CARES Team of GCSA is interested in hearing from you. The Team is in the process of setting up a CARES Academy to be held March 25-29, 2019 in Atlanta, GA specifically for people who are using, or have used, medications such as methadone or buprenorphine to support their recovery. GCSA has trained over 550 peers as CARES, also known as recovery coaches. This certification is the only substance use disorder peer support certification in Georgia that qualifies as a Medicaid billable service, and the program is funded by Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). GCSA was charged by DBHDD to offer trainings for those persons that use MAT to support their recovery. Our staff is enthusiastic about creating a peer workforce of those with the lived experience of MAT. As a way of hearing about their lived experiences we are in the process of conducting what we refer to as a "Listening Sessions" around Georgia. We are learning a great deal by asking three questions.

- What is working in your recovery?
- What gets in the way of your recovery?
- What keeps you hopeful?

Our mission is to provide a CARES academy that focuses on those with the lived experience of MAT while empowering them to be able to reduce the stigma.

**If you are interested in collaborating with GCSA and hosting a listening session to assist us with this initiative, or if you are in recovery with MAT and are interested in becoming a CARES, please contact:**

**Laree Jones MAR/CARES Coordinator  
Georgia Council on Substance Abuse  
404-523-3440  
laree@gasubstanceabuse.org**

# INTRODUCING

## On Site-Training and Education



**OTPG** Opioid Treatment Providers of Georgia

real help = real hope

**OTPG is proud to introduce on-site training and education, So what are you waiting for?  
Schedule a free consultation TODAY.  
Call Joelyn Alfred at (770) 840-9912**

## 2018 Ned Etherington Scholarship Recipients

**In 2017, The Opioid Treatment Providers of Georgia began offering a \$500 scholarship to go toward the cost of treatment for people in medication assisted treatment in an opioid treatment program, who have demonstrated a strong commitment to their recovery. The following people are the 2018 recipients of this scholarship. These are their stories.**

### MAGGIE

I had a typical childhood, I guess. Nothing really stands out as a reason why I would have had a problem with substance abuse later in life. As an adult, I tried several drugs, but nothing really seemed like a problem. I worked in the music industry and everyone seemed to be using something. Then at about 44 years old I had a few surgeries on my stomach and my back. My doctors prescribed opiates for the pain. I had never tried opiates before my surgeries. I loved the feeling. I felt normal for the first time in my life. I felt happy. I didn't realize how depressed I was before trying the opiates, but I see now how down I really was. I quickly became addicted to opiates. I kept going back to my doctor for refills and then later enrolled in pain clinics. I never had a conversation with my doctors about addiction. I wish any of the doctors would have asked me about depression or talked to me about how addicting these medications can be. It is not any of their faults, I just wish I would've known what was in store for me with these opiates.

The worst part about my addiction is that my partner got hooked on the pain pills through me. He had been sober for several years from alcohol and one day he tried one of my pills and was hooked. It became a thing we did together. We spent all our money and were at a point where we didn't know how we were going to survive. That's when a friend of mine told us about The Athens Clinic (DM&ADR).

Going to the clinic changed our lives. We didn't ache from withdrawal anymore and didn't spend all our time chasing our next fix. We were able to do things together again and enjoy life. My partner was able to spend the remaining time he had left on earth, happy in recovery. When he passed away I thought about giving up and going back to the pain pills. I thought about a lot of things that weren't healthy for me, but I realized that isn't what he would want and that wasn't the promise we made to each other when we entered treatment. I did the best I could to stay away from drugs and continue working the program at the clinic. It's been a few years now and I still miss him, but I know he would be proud that I stuck with it. I know that people say a lot of things about Methadone clinics but being at the clinic really saved my life.

### DENNIS

My name is Dennis Wilson. I'm a client at Alliance Recovery Center and I would like to express how ARC has influenced my life. I am now 62 years of age and for the past 30 years or so I have been living with an addiction. In addition to that I am also living with HIV and a Hep C diagnosis that has advanced to stage three cirrhosis of the liver.

In the past I have been in all types of treatment and recovery centers, but Alliance is the best program by far that I've been involved with in years. The focus on recovery and treatment is what had aided me the most. We have meetings available every day; groups that have allowed me to explore areas in my life that I've struggled with for years. One example of that is when I enrolled in ARC I became involved with the excellent Hep C group offered. Alliance helped me enroll in a good

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## 2018 Ned Etherington Scholarship Recipients continued

program at Grady's Infectious Disease program. I was treated with Harvoni for just twelve weeks and now I'm free of the Hep C virus. I am so happy about my new status and I have so many people to thank for that. Alliance Recovery Center played an important role in the process. Walking through the doors of Alliance has helped me improve my life. With the help of the counseling and medical staff I am addressing everyday issues like my health, housing and work.

Despite all the progress that has been made in changing people's mindset and the misconceptions about people living with HIV and people in medically assisted treatment, there is still a large segment of the population that discriminates against people like myself. It is a daily struggle for me to help change these negative misconceptions. Even within the recovery community there is a lot of stigma against MAT. I can remember being so happy about my recovery efforts and my family saying, "you're not clean, what about that methadone?" Methadone is a medication prescribed by a doctor, administered by a nurse, in a clinical setting. It is nothing like my experience dealing with illicit drugs and all the dangers associated with it. MAT eliminates all those risks for me. It's been my life preserver. I am incredibly grateful to the staff of ARC and thankful that they are a part of my support team.

## Come Join Us! become an OTPG member

The annual membership dues are listed below and are based on the current patient census of your facility.

- **0-149 patients: \$250**
- **150-299 patients: \$500**
- **300-499 patients: \$1,000**
- **500+ patients: \$1,500**

Please visit our web site  
for more information on  
membership.

### THE OTPG FALL CONFERENCE SAVE THE DATE:

**NOVEMBER 16, 2018 (FRIDAY)**  
**A NEW LOCATION: A NEW VIBE AT**  
**THE EVERGREEN CONFERENCE CENTER**  
**STONE MOUNTAIN, GA.**  
**(FEATURE PRESENTER:**  
**"DR. MERRILL NORTON"**



Get to know the OTPG  
board members visit  
[www.otpggeorgia.org](http://www.otpggeorgia.org)

### The benefits available to members of OTPG:

- Four free one CEC trainings during 2017
- Access to free hotline maintained by Jackson-Lewis PC, labor and employment law specialists
- Membership with the American Association for the Treatment of Opioid Dependence (AATOD)
- Discounted education opportunities
- Affiliation with community organizations
- Updated state and federal information to include statistics, changes to regulations, available funds, etc.
- Chance to network within our industry
- Ability to purchase discounted copies of "Exploring the World of Opioid Addiction"