



## **Consumer Protection Guidelines for Substance Use Disorder Treatment**

### **How do I find quality treatment providers?**

It is vital individuals seeking treatment consider facilities whose staff includes licensed professionals such as medical doctors, psychiatrists, advanced practice nurses, psychologists, clinical social workers, professional counselors and clinical alcohol and drug counselors. Staff should have appropriate clinical supervision in accordance with their respective licensure requirements.

When seeking treatment, consumers should inquire about which clinical modalities are offered. A quality facility will employ evidence-based treatment such as medication assisted treatment (MAT), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT); dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), motivational interviewing (MI) and gender specific counseling, to name a few. The staff to patient ratio is also an important consideration in seeking quality care. A lower ratio indicates increased availability of staff for clinical services.

Individuals and families with private insurance should consider the cost savings of choosing an in network provider. It is not necessary to go out of state or seek an out of network provider to receive appropriate treatment. Sadly, some families have emptied their bank accounts, dipped into retirement savings or secured a second mortgage to help a loved one receive treatment.

### **Are there red flags I should be aware of?**

Of particular concern is the use of “body brokers” who refer individuals seeking SUD treatment to facilities which may offer substandard treatment. The body broker is paid a generous fee for each referral and is often unregulated by state or federal statutes. They target individuals having private insurance plans with out of network coverage to optimize profits for the treatment facility.

Body brokers solicit individuals at AA/NA meetings, hospital emergency rooms, on social media, through call centers and sober living residences. Brokers may offer free flights to out of state facilities, free rent, cigarettes or gift cards as incentive to use their facility.

For individuals with no insurance, brokers may also offer to purchase generous insurance plans with out of network benefits. The provider may stop paying the premium at any time, particularly when benefits are exhausted. Once the maximum benefit has been reached, some facilities discharge individuals with no linkage to housing or ongoing services a practice known as “curbing”.

Other questionable practices include providers ordering excessive urine or DNA testing which is not clinically warranted. There may be an ownership or kickback arrangement between the facility and the lab. Consumers and families can be left with huge bills as a result of such testing which is billed separately from the treatment facility fees.

Beware of advertised facilities resembling luxury resorts featuring amenities such as spas, beaches, hiking trails, sports, pools, manicures and yoga. In actuality, the facility may bear little resemblance to what



appears on their website or not offer evidence based treatment. Facilities should give the appearance of a healthcare environment with professional staff, not a vacation destination.

### **What should I consider when selecting a sober living home?**

Sober living homes, also known as recovery residences, offer an individual a place to live while in early recovery. There are certainly good sober living homes offering adequate supervision, resident rules, safety and cleanliness. Those in recovery derive many benefits living in a recovery residence through shared life experiences, expenses, and support. However, there has been a proliferation of sober living homes by owners (ie: hedge funds for example) with no expertise in SUD treatment and are strictly profit driven. These homes are frequently inadequately regulated by state or federal statute. Call centers and aggregators may be paid bonuses for referring inquirer to particular sober living home.

Supervision by clinical staff may not be offered; instead staff might be individuals in early recovery. In some cases, sober living homes owners may receive kickbacks from treatment facilities once an individual relapses. There are reports of street drugs being provided by body brokers or sober living home staff to ensure relapse and subsequent return to treatment continuing a lucrative cycle of treatment and relapse lining the pockets of the providers and treating patients as a commodity.

The National Association of Recovery Residences (NARR) is a good resource for consumers and families. It provides standards for sober living homes regarding levels of support, quality, access and choice. Their recovery residence evidence based guidelines are available to facilities, staff, peers and volunteers. NARR affiliates offer certification for recovery residences meeting their criteria. You can visit their website at <http://narronline.org/>.