



2010 Outstanding Clinicians Awards: Joanne Goer



Joanne Goer was instrumental in the transformation of her treatment agency at a time well before most organizations were talking about becoming integrated behavioral health operations. Having arrived at NewBridge Services in Morris and Passaic counties as a forensic clinician, she was encouraged to pursue additional training in addition topics as the traditional mental health agency began to explore more cross-training within its programs.

Position: Director of integrated clinical and addiction services

Organization: NewBridge Services, Inc., Montville, N.J.

Age: 64

Quote: "I was treating drug and alcohol clients before I knew I was treating drug and alcohol clients. It is important for clinicians to be trained in both mental health and addictions."

Comment from a colleague: "Joanne is passionate, tenacious, smart and persuasive," says Robert Parker, NewBridge's executive director. "A community leader, she always creates a respectful, engaging atmosphere when discussing topics that can stir strong opinions."

Goer would spend two hours twice a week at a hospital-based rehabilitation facility. On one occasion, she was sent to a training at a site where she was able to observe round-the-clock care when facility staff got snowed in. The education ultimately would prove invaluable to NewBridge and its clients.

"As the agency's first expert in addiction, she took part in all case conferences to identify clients with substance abuse problems and teach treatment strategies to staff," says NewBridge executive director Robert Parker, who hired Goer in the mid-'80s. "From there, Joanne embarked on a mission to fuse treatment of mental illness and substance abuse throughout NewBridge, which now employs more than 200 people."

Goer fervently believes that all clinicians need to have some training in both addiction and mental health disorders. She says that in the days when these disciplines didn't truly meet, there existed a great deal of professional defensiveness, but mutual respect has developed around the notion of treating the whole person today. "I have seen tremendous change across both fields," she says.

Goer says Stages of Change theory and Motivational Interviewing figure prominently in the clinical strategies used at her agency to treat addictions. She supervises about half a dozen staff clinicians and oversees an addiction treatment team that meets monthly to review cases.

But Parker says that despite an ever-growing workload, "Joanne continues to see clients because she loves the one-on-one contact, the satisfaction of shepherding a person to wellness."

Goer's efforts transcend her own agency's successes. In both of the New Jersey counties where NewBridge operates, she has chaired task forces designed to educate community providers about co-occurring disorders and integrated treatment. In addition, her outreach efforts include demonstrating that the treatment model embraced at her agency can be replicated conveniently, and without breaking the bank.

"She has a keen ability to work with a variety of professionals, including doctors, nurses, social workers and licensed drug and alcohol counselors, to achieve her goal of treating clients holistically," Parker says of Goer.

Goer replies that her agency has made it easy for her to excel. "Whenever I have seen something that has needed to be changed, this agency has been extremely flexible in giving me the latitude to make changes."

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