

## Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention

### Benzodiazepine Action Work Group Meeting Minutes

October 1, 2024 via Zoom

#### **Present:**

Gail Dawson, Co-chair, Amanda McBarron, Barbara Connolly, D.E. Foster, Jake Ressler, J.C. Curle, John Staight, Lisa Leibe Gemmill, Marjorie DeWert, Nancy Davies, Nicole Valdovinos, Wendy Jo Cole

Consortium: Jose Esquibel, Gina Olberding, Shayna Micucci, Jessia Eaddy, Teresa Cantwell

**Absent:** See attached roster.

#### **Approval of Minutes:**

A motion was made to approve the August 2024 meeting minutes. Motion approved.

#### **D.E. Foster Announcement:**

D. Foster announced that he is adding a new community to his Easy Anxiety website: <https://www.easinganxiety.com/uneven> The community, which can also be accessed via phone app, will focus on people who are experiencing life struggles, including anxiety, benzodiazepine issues, or other life complications. Eventually, the community will involve payment for participation and will include discounts. Plans are to use the funds to support peers. The site will offer a chat room, events, and content contributions. Jake Ressler said he would assist with the site.

#### **Historical Overview & Recommended Next Steps:**

Gina Olberding gave an overview of the work group's accomplishments and plans for future work. Former work group co-chairs, Alexis Ritvo and D.E. Foster, had expressed the importance of having one co-chair with a medical perspective and one co-chair with lived experience. Alexis and D were replaced by co-chairs Gail Dawson (medical background) and Madison Zang (lived experience). Since Madison Zang has now had a change in employment, she is no longer able to assume a co-chair role. After a further review of funding priorities that support the work group's Colorado focus, Gina asked for meeting participant comments on the work group's future direction.

Jose Esquibel confirmed that the Consortium has a Colorado focus, but said the national perspective helps the work being done in Colorado and vice versa.

J.C. Curle asked if it would be feasible to have an Advisory Medical Board rather than a co-chair with clinical experience.

With reference to the Colorado vs. national focus, D.E. questioned if the work group should remain part of the Consortium or become a national organization.

Barbara Connolly said it was clear the group has moved towards a more national focus, as there are many people from other areas of the US who are involved. In addition, funding is an important consideration.

John Staight commented that work group efforts had made it a national leader on the issue of benzodiazepines, and that people from all over the country have become involved. He recounted a presentation he gave at a mental health conference along with Steve Wright and Terri Schreiber and the impact it had on medical professionals in the audience. He suggested the Consortium could have as large an impact on medical professionals as it has had with opioids. He expressed frustration regarding the fact that he, as an individual with lived experience, finds it difficult to reach any of the medical professionals in a decision-making position, given that the perspective of someone with lived experience is crucial.

Gina listed the Consortium's benzodiazepine education to date and the importance of continuing to promote this education for providers (see from Chat below). Shayna Micucci represented the work group at the National Rx Summit in Atlanta in April, which garnered national exposure.

J.C. felt the work group should remain part of the Consortium and that projects such as speaking engagements, videos, and public events could raise funding to support the work. She also mentioned interviews with media coverage and legislation efforts.

D expressed appreciation for the Consortium's support, but also said it has been difficult to get volunteers to help (with the exception of peer training). D tried to establish a speaker's bureau, but there was little support. He said new projects are great to plan, but need people to do the work.

Shayna reported that the Consortium has received speaker requests, but most are provider focused. Terri Schreiber and Alexis Ritvo spoke at a Colorado Pharmacists Society conference over the summer to discuss BIND, benzodiazepine issues, and prescribing. She suggested a better job could be done to share the work group's accomplishments. She said she would look further into including additional benzodiazepine education in the lunch and learn series.

John suggested the work group should be more proactive about arranging future speaking engagements rather than waiting for requests.

Gina said that she, Jose, D, and Alexis met a year ago and discussed work group priorities and projects. They discussed the following:

- Plan for convening peers who have been trained; consider a questionnaire/survey and invitation to join the work group
- Plan on local outreach to Colorado providers
- Explore how to reach people with lived/living experience
- Consider public awareness activities related to benzodiazepines; increase awareness among a variety of groups
- Consider a benzodiazepine consultation and "warm line" staffed with trained specialists

Of the above priorities, the peer convening was organized, and Shayna has been working with Ginger Ross of Choices Training to update the training based on feedback received during the convening.

Barbara said she would be willing to speak publicly and suggested a better system of letting people know about opportunities. She asked if there were organizations similar to the Consortium in other states that could be explored.

Gail Dawson said she would like to do a deprescribing presentation to community mental health providers and suggested a person with lived experience could be part of the presentation.

The work group discussed ways in which trained peers and others harmed by benzodiazepines could be connected to providers as well as the commitment level of current work group members, particularly since the death of Dr. Huff.

Shayna summarized ongoing efforts involved in training, including post-training evaluations. National opportunities are being discussed with Choices Training. She suggested that next steps include a more focused discussion about priority areas.

Barbara suggested that modules could be modified for different audiences.

The following action items were suggested:

- Jose: Compile a list of the work group's accomplishments to date as well as a survey of priorities to inform a discussion at the November meeting
- Jake: The survey should contain known options and open-ended (write-in) spaces.
- Gina: Compile a list of current projects, including the list of ongoing provider education modules.

Shayna asked work group members to email her if they have any additional suggestions: [Shayna.micucci@cuanschultz.edu](mailto:Shayna.micucci@cuanschultz.edu)

### **Adjournment/Next Meeting:**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:00 p.m. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 5, 2024 from noon to 1 p.m. (Election Day). The meeting may be rescheduled.

Attachments: Work group roster

List of current benzodiazepine modules:

- Appropriate Prescribing & Alternative Treatments (Alexis Ritvo, MD & Jeffrey Gold, PharmD)
- Deprescribing & Tapering Benzodiazepines (Jeffrey Gold, MD & Alexis Ritvo, MD)
- Benzodiazepines - Boon or Blunder? (Steven Wright, MD)
- Consequences of Benzodiazepine Prescribing & At-Risk Populations (Alexis Ritvo, MD & Jeffrey Gold, PharmD)
- Safe Prescribing of Benzodiazepines: Lessons Learned from the Opioid Epidemic
- Benzodiazepine-Induced Neurological Dysfunction (Christy Huff, MD & DE Foster)