

Testimony of Jason Gaurich
HR 590 Public Hearing
Oct. 14, 2016

I would like to thank the Task Force for asking me to testify today on my experience with access to treatment.

My name is Jason Gaurich and I am recovering addict. I started using marijuana at age 15. I then progressed to harder drugs. On Sept. 25, 1999, I was in a near fatal car accident which left me paralyzed in my left arm and with severe nerve pain. This also caused PTSD and depression. As a result of my injuries I was prescribed 50mcg and 75mcg fentanyl patches for 2 ½ years. This was my first experience with opiates. I started using heroin during this time. After my doctor discontinued my fentanyl patches I experienced withdrawal for the very first time. Unfortunately, it wouldn't be the last.

I continued to use heroin for the next 15 years. That left me with no life skills. My physical and mental disabilities along with my addiction precluded me from being employable. I WAS NOT A FUNCTIONING ADDICT.

In 2008, I got clean for 6 months and the first time went to therapy. I started seeing a Psychiatrist who diagnosed me with PTSD and depression. My sister and I both saw the same therapist and we both felt that the therapist tried getting us to divulge personal information about each. As a result of not having social or life skills I did what I always did and quit seeing this therapist. I used my addict thinking and thought saying "I'll show them", so I quit seeing the Psychiatrist too! Soon I was using heroin again.

Many detox and inpatient rehabs followed. My insurance only paid for 14 days. My mental health issues were never addressed while at these facilities, nor was I taught any life skills, therefore I used heroin the day I came home every time! Each time I completed inpatient I was told to go to outpatient. Once again actively using heroin and still suffering from my mental health disorders I did not follow through with outpatient.

July 5, 2016, is when I decided to get clean again. I went to detox and inpatient. I truly believe that the only reason that I was able to get into this facility within one day is because I knew someone who worked there. All of the other places that I called said that they had no available beds. They said to keep calling back. ADDICTS DO NOT KEEP CALLING BACK, WE DIE! I was at this facility for a total of 27 days including detox. This is the longest that I ever stayed.

I had an appointment set up for outpatient before I left inpatient. I started out in partial outpatient from 9am – 4pm Monday through Thursday. This does not leave me many days to be available to work. My therapist does not do individual therapy sessions. Most of us do not

have a drivers' license when we get clean and if we do; we do not have a car. I pay for my own bus tickets because no one at this facility told me about the Medical Assistance Transportation Program. I think that all outpatient programs should give us bus tickets to get to and from treatment. But before I got my job I had to get bus money from my mom. For a 40 year old man to get money from his mother for bus fare is a humbling experience.

Once again, this facility does not offer any mental health services.

My friend Adrienne, who is a Certified Recovery Specialist and volunteers answering Message Carriers of Pennsylvania Telephonic Recovery Helpline, told me to get a therapist at a local drug and alcohol and mental health provider. When I called to make the appointment the receptionist told me that I could not see a therapist there because I receive services at another drug and alcohol provider. Adrienne called this facility to find out what to do. I was told to call them back and tell them specifically that I wanted a mental health therapist and a psychiatrist. I had to have the inpatient and outpatient providers fax something to this new provider. Both places told me that the new provider must fax them a release FIRST. I had to go back to the new provider and sign releases to get faxed to the inpatient and outpatient providers. All of this was extremely overwhelming for a "junkie with 45 days clean." When presented with these obstacles in the past I would just think that this was impossible and just used. Finally, all the paperwork got completed after 2 long weeks. Right after my assessment the therapist that I was assigned got a promotion and couldn't see me. I was told that they will call me when they get a new therapist. The new provider also told me that my health insurance will not allow me to go to both providers on the same day. That leaves only Fridays open for me to see a mental health therapist. Being that I go to partial Monday through Thursday, I can only work on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. If I can only see my mental health provider on Fridays and I work on Fridays, where does this leave me? Another 2 weeks have passed. I still haven't seen the psychiatrist; the provider only has one psychiatrist who is not accepting new clients at this time. So I have been clean 100 days and still have not seen anyone for my mental health issues. For the first time, it's not due to MY lack of trying.

Drugs are not the only problem for addicts. It is a symptom of the disease. We have no life skills, no motivation, and are irresponsible. Someone, like a Certified Recovery Specialist, needs to help walk us through early recovery and life in general. Recovery means to me change plus abstinence, not just abstinence. All I learn about in treatment is abstinence. I would have never known that a Certified Recovery Specialist existed because no provider ever told about it or referred to one. Not everyone is blessed like I am with a friend who is a Certified Recovery Specialist.

Why does my insurance company dictate how long it takes me to recover? Why didn't they ever tell me about a Certified Recovery Specialist that could help me navigate the system?

They never once asked to talk to me and ask me what I need or if I think I need more days in treatment.