National Association of Healthcare Advocacy Consultants (NAHAC)

Standards and Best Practices

A. Statement of Intent

NAHAC offers this document of Standards and Best Practices to its members for comments. NAHAC will consider comments from all full members and will revise this document as necessary. NAHAC considers this a living document that will evolve over time. It will be the foundational statement of standards and best practices for our organization. If NAHAC makes revisions to this document, the members will be notified of the changes.

B. FORWARD

B-1 NAHAC is the nation's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to the development of healthcare advocacy as a profession. The objective of the organization is to benefit and protect consumers. NAHAC is an organization of Professional Healthcare Advocates and lay members who share the goal of promoting safe, effective, holistic and compassionate healthcare services. NAHAC represents professionals working with individual consumers and family caregivers who need assistance navigating through complex healthcare situations. Titles of these professionals may include: healthcare advocate, patient advocate, patient navigator, case manager. A Professional Healthcare Advocate (PHA) may work in diverse settings. For example a PHA may work independently, or in a medical setting, in healthcare or other companies, or on behalf of communities or disease-specific populations.

B-2 The mission of NAHAC is to:

1. Define effective advocacy skills
2. Ensure consumer protection through development of professional standards and best practices in the field of healthcare advocacy
3. Educate members and the general public on effective advocacy skills
4. Promote the field of healthcare advocacy

B-3 Why is there need for a document on Standards and Best Practices?
NAHAC's Statement of Standards and Best Practices is intended to be an extension and elaboration of its Code of Ethics (http://www.nahac.com/code/) to ensure the protection of consumers/clients for whom its Healthcare Advocates work.

Adherence to NAHAC's Code of Ethics is a condition of membership in NAHAC. NAHAC establishes these practices recognizing that similar work is being done by the Patient Advocate Credentialing Steering Committee, formed in 2013 and comprised of national leaders in Healthcare Advocacy. The mission of the committee is to establish a national credential for those who advocate for patients.

Ethical questions and concerns of the public regarding a PHA's behavior may be referred to the NAHAC Board of Directors for evaluation.

NAHAC recognizes that its Code of Ethics, Standards and Best Practices will evolve as healthcare delivery changes over time.

NAHAC members and other interested parties should access the NAHAC website periodically for the most current version of all relevant documents. Its website is: Nahac.memberlodge.com

B-4 Principles in Developing NAHAC's Standards and Best Practices: PHAs who are professional members of NAHAC share a common commitment to professional practice based on (a) ethical professional conduct; (b) standards and best practices; and (c) appropriate training and experience.

This Standards and Best Practices document serves as guiding principles that support the NAHAC Professional Code of Ethics surrounding this particular field of advocacy. It attempts to articulate the knowledge, skills, responsibilities, patient protections, and limitations of advocate practice that a consumer should reasonably expect to be met by all NAHAC advocates. Further, this document acknowledges and recognizes that subspecialties in advocacy may reasonably require additional knowledge, skills, experience, training and/or licensing.

PHAs work in a variety of settings including private practice, hospitals, government, legislative, community, insurance, and employee assistance programs and other organizations.

NAHAC recognizes that its work exists in an evolving interdisciplinary field that is currently formalizing best practice, credentialing, and licensing appropriate to the unique skills, roles, and responsibilities of this field.

C. DEFINITIONS

C-1 Advocacy: The totality of services provided to consumer/clients by a PHA. A PHA is a person providing services to consumers/clients. **Consumer/clients** will be referred to as clients throughout this document.

The services PHAs provide to clients include but are not limited to (1) helping to clarify the clients' personal values and preferences regarding his/her healthcare; (2) assisting clients or consumer groups at all levels in the healthcare system to make informed choices regarding available options and resources for his/her healthcare; and (3) maximizing client abilities to select among alternative treatment options by providing relevant healthcare information and (4) obtaining the highest quality healthcare available while fully utilizing health insurance and/or available resources.

Healthcare Advocacy supports or promotes the interest of the client. A PHA provides direct service to the client and/or family to promote access to optimal healthcare services within or beyond his/her local communities. The settings and roles of the PHA may vary.

> ***Examples of Advocacy Sub-specialties****: cancer; clinical trials; end of life care; legal; disability; financial issues.*

> ***Examples of special populations****: pediatrics; senior care*

Advocates can hold titles such as**:** *Healthcare Advocate; Patient Advocate; Patient Healthcare Advocate; Health Advocate; Private Healthcare Advocate; Advocates; Care Managers, Geriatric Care Managers; Professional Health Advocate; Disability Advocate; Legal Advocate, Medical Navigator, Care Coordinator.*

C-2 Definition of Code of Ethics as it relates to Healthcare Advocates: The demand for services of PHAs within the community has been driven largely by several factors. These factors include: **(1)** the wide availability and dissemination of healthcare information in the public media over the past decade; **(2)** recent, dramatic changes in healthcare regulations, payment systems and treatment options; and **(3)** and growing public dissatisfaction with healthcare experience**s**.

NAHACs' Code of Ethics guides its professional members in ethical behavior, standards and values. The Code of Ethics is the foundation of the organization**'**s commitment to the profession of healthcare advocacy. These standards and values articulate that:

- Our primary purpose is to improve our clients' well-being by making it as easy as possible to use the healthcare system for the best possible outcomes in accordance with the client's wishes.
- PHAs assume the responsibility to assist clients to make informed choices regarding some or all aspects of his/her healthcare.
- PHAs act as a liaison between our clients and the people or organizations involved in his/her care.

C-3 Definition of Standards: Standards are defined as the minimal requirements to meet the best outcomes outlined in the Best Practices.

C-4 Definition of Best Practices: Best Practices are defined as evidence-based recommendation to ensure successful outcomes.

The Best Practices document articulates responsibilities, protections, limitations of practices, as well as, knowledge, and skills that clients should reasonably expect to be met by any PHA. PHAs with subspecialties or who work with special populations may require more specifically defined Best Practices as well as additional skills, experience, training and/or licensing.

Compliance with Ethical Principles and Best Practices:

The foundation of PHAs' professional responsibility to his/her clients is his/her compliance with Ethical Principles and Best Practices. Best Practices explain "how" to convert these principles into practice. Our standards articulate the knowledge, skills, responsibilities, patient protections and limitations of advocate practice for all PHAs.

D. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OUTLINED

Ethical Principle 1: Advocacy

Ethical Principle: The PHA works on behalf of the client with the intention of supporting optimal health outcomes.

Objective: To establish a professional helping relationship with the client focused on a definition and assessment of the client's healthcare needs, and providing information and guidance about navigating the healthcare system.

Best Practice: The PHA works for the client's wishes and needs.

Best Practice Standard: For each client, the PHA will:

- Assess physical, emotional, social, spiritual, financial and environmental needs as they impact the client's health and well-being.
- Assess client's living situation – current or potential options.
- Assess client's interaction with significant others.
- Share the assessment with the client.
- Develop a plan of care based on the assessment.
- Share the plan and come to agreement on the plan with the client.
- Communicate with healthcare providers, significant others and additional resources to the extent appropriate to maintain or improve the consumer's health and well-being.

Ethical Principle 2: Transparency and Honest Disclosure

Ethical Principle: The PHA is committed to integrity and total transparency in the conduct of his/her practices.

Objective: To aid the client in fully understanding the role of the PHA

Best Practice: Transparency

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Disclose to the client complete information about the PHA's fees, training, education, experience, and credentials, as well as areas of possible conflicts of interest.
- Develop with the client clear expectations related to scope of practice to allow for strong working relationships between the PHA and his/her clients.
- Provide his/her CV/resume and references upon request.
- Provide a fee schedule and written agreement to the client.
- Whenever possible the PHA will refrain from referring clients to products or care services that will financially benefit the PHA. In the event that a referral to a service or product could financially benefit the PHA, the PHA must inform client in writing that he/she will benefit financially from the referral if that is the case.

Ethical Principle 3: Protect Confidentiality and Privacy

Ethical Principle: The PHA is committed to maintaining the client's right to privacy.

Objective: To respect the client's right to privacy and protect client's personal and protected health information.

Best Practice: Confidentiality

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Abide by all relevant laws and regulations relating to confidentiality of personal health information (PHI) and personal identifiable information (PII).
- Respect and protect consumer medical records, communications and identity of their consumer.
    - *Examples of this may include but are not limited to the following:*
    - *Ensures that computer storage is password protected*
    - *Encrypts emails with protected personal and health information*
    - *Avoids using protected health information when using non-encrypted email*

Ethical Principle 4: Fostering Autonomy

Ethical Principle: The PHA will (1) respect and empower the consumer's client's right to exercise informed decisions in his/her healthcare; and (2) ensure that the consumer's wishes are the guiding force behind decisions on medical care, even if differing from family.

Objective: To empower the client to exercise meaningful, informed consent regarding his/her healthcare decisions.

Best Practice: Empowerment

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Treat the client with respect and compassion.

- Respect the dignity and freedom of each client to make his or her own decisions grounded in the cultural, spiritual, and ethical context of that individual.
- Promote informed decision making related to each client's healthcare including end of life decisions.
- Assess client's understanding of his/her current health related circumstances and provide clients with information facilitate informed decision making.
- Assist clients to understand their care and treatment options, including potential risks, benefits, and available alternatives.
- When the client has a legally designated surrogate, the PHA will convey relevant medical history, statutory patients' rights and possible care options, as well as any personal conversations in which the client may have expressed certain wishes to help aid in making informed decisions.
- Encourage clients to complete necessary documentation as appropriate: e.g., Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare; Durable Power of Attorney for Financial Affairs; Advanced Directives.

Ethical Principle 5: Provision of Competent Services

Ethical Principle: The PHA will practice at all times within his/her area of competency and seek to enhance his/her professional expertise.

Objective: To ensure clients have received credible information in order to make truly informed decisions.

Best Practice: Competence

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Inform clients of his/her specific areas of proficiency, and only advise clients within that area where s/he has demonstrated expertise. If a client needs assistance in an area in which the PHA does not have sufficient knowledge or training, the PHA will refer the client to someone who is equipped to provide those services.
- Provide references to the clients upon request.
- Develop and maintain an adequate referral system to assist clients who need services the PHA is unable to provide.
- Commit to continuing one's education in order to keep one's knowledge and skills current.

Ethical Principle 6: Maintenance of Professional Boundaries

Ethical Principle: The PHA will at all times work within professional boundaries and will refrain from any behavior that violates or appears to violate those boundaries.

Objective: To clarify the scope and limits of the PHA's role with the intent to avoid inappropriate interactions or conflicts of interest.

Best Practice: Professionalism and Role Boundaries

Best Practice Standard: The PHA:

- Is prepared for each client engagement.
- Is honest and ethical in all business practices.
- Regularly assesses one's relationship with the client in order to develop, recognize and maintain professional boundaries.
- Maintains professional boundaries with the client, and removes oneself from situations in which those boundaries are or appear to be at risk.
- Provides the client with referrals to other PHAs in situations where one must removes oneself from the working relationship with the client.
- Expresses respect for clients and other professionals with whom the PHA works.
- Shares with the client the projected length and scope of the relationship keeping in mind criteria for appropriate termination of the relationship.

Ethical Principle 7: Avoidance of Discriminatory Practices

Ethical Principle: The PHA promotes autonomy and dignity of individuals and acts to prevent discriminatory healthcare practices.

Objective: To avoid discriminatory practices while providing culturally-sensitive advocacy services.

Best Practice: Cultural Awareness and Discrimination Avoidance

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Accept and assist clients regardless of age, race, spirituality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or economic status. When PHA-Client working relationship requires assistance the PHA will seek guidance from or refer to another experienced PHA.
- Develop terms-of-service / service agreement that is free of any evidence of discrimination.
- Discloses to clients terms of service.
- Provide resources and referrals to the client based on the client's healthcare needs and wishes.
- When unfamiliar with the client's ethnic background, will study appropriate materials and incorporate his/her substance into the provision of the client's healthcare.
- Treats each client with respect and dignity, and promotes access to appropriate healthcare and treatment.

Ethical Principle 8: Continued Learning

Ethical Principle: The PHA is committed to continue learning to hone professional skills and maintain knowledge of current conditions and standards in a rapidly changing healthcare environment.

Objective: To attain and maintain the highest level of competence and service involving Healthcare Advocacy.

Best Practice: Professional Development

Best Practice Standard: The PHA will:

- Participate in continued professional education.
- Obtain continuing education credits as dictated by one's professional license and regulatory/credentialing bodies.
- Continue to develop skills and maintain competence in one's specific area of expertise.
- Share information and resources for the benefit of the NAHAC membership and the public.
- Consult with colleagues regarding challenging client situations as an opportunity to learn.
- Participate in the professional development of other PHA's by mentoring or participating in professional education programs.

E. REFERENCES

AMERICAN NURSES' ASSOCIATION

http://www.**nursingworld.org**/

http://www.nursingworld.org/**nursingstandards**

"National Council on Interpreting in Health Care Develops National Standards for Interpreters." Ethics and Standards of Practice. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Jan. 2014.

"Welcome Visitors!" NAPGCM RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 14 Jan. 2014.

REHABILITATION COUNSELORS

http://www.crccertification.com/pages/crc_ccrc_code_of_ethics/10.php

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS

http://www.socialworkers.org/

http://www.socialworkers.org/nasw/annualreport2003/**mission**.asp

http://www.socialworkers.org/nasw/**Vision**Speech0809.pdf

http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/standards/**naswhealthcarestandards.pdf**

SOCIETY FOR HEALTHCARE CONSUMER ADVOCACY

http://www.shca-aha.org/