

# SC RESOURCE CONNECTION

Winter 2008

## Inside This Issue

- 1 The AEL in SC
- 3 Organization Profile
- 4 LLR RPP Program
- 4 Upcoming Events
- 4 Contact Us

---

*SC has an outdated law that impedes detection of drunk drivers, increases health care costs and the practice of defensive medicine...the Alcohol Exclusion Law.*

---

## Greetings!

Welcome to the SC Resource Connection newsletter. Our goal is to provide readers with important and useful information concerning South Carolina events, services and legislation in the mental health field. This newsletter is being offered once a quarter and content is obtained through interviews, articles, and contributions from members in the community. The majority of information provided is in brief form. References are provided so you may conduct more thorough investigation. Also note that content is not necessarily a reflection of our own viewpoint but is rather an attempt to offer the reader an overview of key activities happening in South Carolina. We hope this serves as an effective quick reference guide for busy mental health professionals!

Enjoy!

**David P. Diana, MA, LPC, NCC**

Clinical Liaison for Palmetto Behavioral Health

## The Alcohol Exclusion Law In SC: An Opinion Piece by Michael Laughlin, MD

The national Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has introduced an initiative, which has been scientifically proven to increase the detection of drunk drivers by use of screening and brief intervention in emergency rooms, trauma centers and primary care settings. Even though the effectiveness of screening has been proven by many studies over the past ten years, there remains a barrier to implementing screening and brief intervention in South Carolina...the Alcohol Exclusion Law (AEL).

South Carolina has an outdated law on the books that impedes detection of drunk drivers, increases health care costs and the practice of defensive medicine, and discourages the screening of problem drinkers. It is time for South Carolina to repeal the Alcohol Exclusion Law.

The AEL says that an insurance company doesn't have to cover medical costs if the injured party is under the influence of alcohol or drugs. That puts doctors in a tough position. Their Hippocratic Oath says they must treat the patient fully, but if that patient is intoxicated, it means they might never get paid for an enormously expensive medical procedure. Rather than going out of business, doctors have found an unhappy solution. Unless they absolutely must screen for emergency medical reasons, they simply don't check to see if the patient is intoxicated. Doctors cannot be blamed for this practice, but it represents an unhappy and dangerous compromise that has severe consequences.

## The Alcohol Exclusion Law in SC (Continued)

---

*If it weren't for the AEL, hospitals would screen tomorrow. Imagine the repeat DUIs and the broken lives such screening would prevent.*

---

The cost of not screening for alcohol is devastating. A study at University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas demonstrated that when trauma patients are screened for alcohol problems and receive just a 30-minute "brief intervention" (*a combination of education & counseling*), they have 28 fewer drinks per week and are 48 percent less likely to be readmitted to a hospital than patients who do not receive such an intervention. If it weren't for the AEL, hospitals would screen tomorrow. Imagine the repeat DUIs and the broken lives such screening would prevent.

The idea behind adopting the original AEL was understandable. The theory was that people who knew they wouldn't be covered if they had an accident while under the influence would abstain from drinking and be less inclined to cause social disruption. But the deterrent effect of the law has failed—it just doesn't work.

The AEL may—in cases when it can actually be invoked—reduce short-term costs to insurers on a one-time basis, but in the long run, problem drinking is incredibly expensive to insurers. It is estimated that \$19 billion is spent in America annually on alcohol-related health care expenses alone. In putting up obstacles to alcohol counseling, insurers are not only failing to put many of their members on course for a much healthier lifestyle—they are also costing themselves money: A second study out of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas showed that for every dollar spent on alcohol counseling for injured patients, there is a savings of \$3.81 in overall health expenditures.

Groups ranging from the American Medical Association to Mothers Against Drunk Driving have spoken out against the Alcohol Exclusion Law, which has recently been repealed in nine states including North Carolina. Even the National Association of Insurance Commissioners—the group that drafted the original model legislation almost 60 years ago—now recommends that such laws be repealed. Organizations supporting repeal of the Alcohol Exclusion Law in South Carolina include: the Behavior Health Services Alliance, the South Carolina Medical Association and the South Carolina Hospital Association.

Faces and Voices of Recovery Tri-County (FAVOR Tri-County) urges all citizens to ask their SC Congressmen to vote for repeal of the Alcohol Exclusion Law. SC Representative Carl Gullick has introduced H. 4059, which will accomplish that if passed. Senator Dave Thomas will introduce the senate version of the bill in the near future.

Failing to identify and treat substance use in emergency services is likely to cost South Carolina businesses and residents \$148 million each year in extra healthcare expenses. Screening and brief intervention in hospital ERs yields \$351 in savings per patient through reduced re-injury and re-hospitalization costs.

Whether you're worried about reducing DUIs, getting more people cleaned up or improving the bottom line of our shaky health care system, it is high time to put an old, bad law out to pasture.

Michael Laughlin, MD  
Chairman,  
Faces and Voices of Recovery –SC  
[www.favorsc.org](http://www.favorsc.org)



For more information  
contact FAVOR-SC at  
[www.favorsc.org](http://www.favorsc.org)

## Organization Profile: Palmetto Behavioral Health

Palmetto Behavioral Health is a private behavioral healthcare organization serving the Coastal and Pee Dee areas of South Carolina with a broad range of mental health services addressing the needs of individuals and families living with mental illness and addictive disease.

Palmetto Behavioral Health is accredited by The Joint Commission, certified by Medicare, Medicaid and Champus, and licensed by the Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC).

Psychiatric programs and services for children, adolescents, adults and seniors are offered in **private inpatient and outpatient settings**.

Palmetto Behavioral Health continues to grow in both clinical scope and size. Some more recent offerings of note are:

- Comprehensive **residential treatment services** in Charleston, Summerville and Florence, SC for children/adolescents totaling 151 beds.
- A **16-bed inpatient crisis stabilization unit for children** and adolescents that includes a substance abuse treatment track.
- An intensive adult outpatient treatment program offering **Dialectical Behavioral Therapy** facilitated by a certified DBT professional.
- An **outpatient adult recovery program** utilizing state of the art evidenced based treatment models.
- A new **10-bed Women's Psychiatric Unit** offering specialized treatment services for women in a safe and nurturing environment.

Palmetto Behavioral Health provides free assessment and referral services 24 hours and 7 days a week. A face-to-face assessment can be scheduled with a qualified mental health professional to review the individual's concerns and to discuss the best treatment options.

Would you like more information about these and other Palmetto Behavioral Health services?

Call Palmetto Behavioral Health at **843-747-5830** or David Diana at **843-696-0977**.



For more information call 843-747-5830 or visit [www.palmettobehavioralhealth.com](http://www.palmettobehavioralhealth.com).



**Premier Mental Health Services For Women**

Call **Palmetto Behavioral Health** at 843-747-5830 for more information.

## LLR introduces Recovering Professionals Program for Mental Health Professionals

The **Recovering Professional Program (RPP)** is a confidential professional substance abuse monitoring service contracted through the Lexington/Richland Alcohol and Drug Abuse Council (LARADAC) to address the problem of impaired healthcare professionals. It was originally designed for boards of Dentistry, Medical Examiners, Nursing and Pharmacy to provide a consistent, accountable mechanism for early identification, referral and monitoring of licensees with substance abuse problems.

The Board of LPC, LMFT and Psycho-educational specialists has recently decided to make the services of the RPP available to its licensees.

RPP is designed both to be an alternative and a supplement to the board's disciplinary process. The RPP accepts both board referrals and voluntary participants for a 5-year monitoring program in which licensees have an opportunity to return to safe effective practice. The program management is funded through LLR and participants are required to pay the costs associated with their individual participation.

Please contact the RPP at **877-349-2094** or visit them on the web at [www.scrpp.org](http://www.scrpp.org).

## Upcoming Events

Have an event you'd like to advertise? Call David Diana at 843-696-0977!

### Helping Professionals Training

**February 1**

Psychology & the Law; 8:30-10:30am  
Helen Elliott Wheeler, Med, LPC  
Call 843-696-0977 for details

### SC Counseling Association Spring Conference

**Feb. 7-9**

[www.thepalmettocounselor.org](http://www.thepalmettocounselor.org)

### Southeast Regional EAP Conference

**Feb. 27-29**

[www.sceapa.org](http://www.sceapa.org)

### South Carolina Social Work Spring Symposium

**March 2-5**

[www.scnasw.org](http://www.scnasw.org)

### Palmetto Behavioral Health Women's Unit

**Feb. 2008**

Open House Coming Soon  
Call 843-747-5830 for details

## New & Noteworthy

[www.scresourceconnection.com](http://www.scresourceconnection.com)

- Centralized mental health community for SC

[www.palmettobehavioralhealth.com](http://www.palmettobehavioralhealth.com)

- A growing behavioral healthcare organization in SC

[www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org](http://www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org)

- National site organizing the recovery community

[www.tuw.org](http://www.tuw.org)

- SC Trident United Way

[www.eqptools.com](http://www.eqptools.com)

- Great site for mental health products. Mt. Pleasant Company!