

NJAMHAA CEO Honored with Carrier Clinic's Inaugural Codey Award for Battling Stigma

On November 2, 2013, NJAMHAA CEO Debra Wentz, Ph.D., was honored by NJAMHAA member Carrier Clinic with the agency's inaugural *Codey Award* in recognition of her efforts to eliminate stigma. The award was presented by Governor Richard Codey and his wife, Mary Jo, who have both been prominent in educational, legislative and advocacy efforts to eliminate stigma and to build awareness of mental illnesses, and access to and quality of services.

"Stigma is powerful and harmful. By educating people to recognize the signs and symptoms of these illnesses and indicating the resources for help, fear starts to be eliminated," Dr. Wentz said. "When a Governor and his wife share that they are dealing with a mental illness in their own family, it is so powerful that it is game changing. When a Governor speaks, people listen. And when individuals reveal their personal experience, that is equally courageous."

"The greatest stigma has been through the lack of parity in insurance coverage, which was a major obstacle to even accessing treatment and too often, forced individuals to seek care in emergency rooms or jails or through self-medication. Even now, with the federal parity laws about to be available to more people in New Jersey on January 1st with the Medicaid Expansion and opening of the Health Insurance Marketplace, unless the federal government issues final parity rules that provide a detailed outline of how mental health and addictions treatment must be treated, and has a strong enforcement component, some insurance companies will still attempt to limit access to comprehensive care and support services that are necessary for recovery for people living with mental illness, substance use and co-occurring disorders."

"As Anatole France, a French novelist said, 'To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.' I believe that with leaders like Governor and Mrs. Codey; providers like Don Parker*, John Monahan and Bob Parker; advocates like Sylvia Axelrod, the NAMI-NJ Board and staff, Shauna Moses and the other brave individuals and families who use their experience to educate, we will win the battle against stigma and discrimination!" Dr. Wentz stated.

Congratulations to Dr. Wentz and to Sylvia Axelrod, Executive Director of NAMI-NJ, who received Carrier Clinic's Kindred Spirit Award, also in recognition of her innovative initiatives and determination to eliminate stigma.

* Don Parker is President/CEO of Carrier Clinic; John Monahan is a NJAMHAA Board member and President/CEO of Greater Trenton Behavioral HealthCare; Bob Parker is a NJAMHAA Board member and CEO of NewBridge Services; Shauna Moses is Associate Executive Director of NJAMHAA.