

CRT & Wheelchair Repair Advisory Council

MINUTES

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

11:00 AM Zoom Remote Meeting Broadcast On Zoom and YouTube Live

Roll Call:

Members present: Jonathon Slifka (ADS, Co-Chair), Maureen Amirault (Co-Chair), Jim Carson (CID), Farrah Garland, Becki Jacobson (OHA), Ginny Mahoney (DSS), David Morgana, Diane Racicot (provider), Darrell Ruopp (OT), Shirley Skyers-Thomas (CCP), Joe Shortt, Sheldon Toubman.

Members Absent: Michelle Johnson.

Guest Present: Gary Gilberti (provider)

- I. CONVENE MEETING: the meeting was convened at 11:00 by Co-Chair Maureen Amirault.
- II. REMARKS BY THE CHAIRS: Co-Chair Amirault welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced the Council's final report was distributed to legislators on January 10, 2025. Legislation will be considered in response to the report although no bill number has been assigned. Co-Chair Slifka welcomed everyone to the meeting.
 - a. In the future, the plan is to get reports from NSM and Numotion to The Clerk one week in advance of the meeting so it can be distributed along with the minutes of the previous meeting.
 - b. Amirault invited members to submit agenda items one week in advance of the meeting, if possible.
 - c. Morgana proposed a NEW ITEM for discussion regarding the newsletter from Numotion Wheelchair & Mobility Equipment Company distributed to the Council. Approved by a voice vote.
 - d. Garland proposed an additional NEW ITEM to the agenda to discuss the reports from NSM and Numotion. Approved by voice vote.
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JANUARY 7, 2025: MOTION by Garland, seconded by Silka. Approved by voice vote.
- IV. NEW ITEM: DISCUSSION OF REPORTS FROM NSM AND NUMOTION
 - a. Amirault mentioned the reports received are recorded on the "fillable" form that was created by a subgroup of last year's Council and will show comparable data for ease of analysis.
 - b. NSM report by Racicot:
 - i. The printed report was displayed on the screen for Council review. Racicot reviewed highlights of the NSM report, including Business Days (required by legislation) and Calendar Days (as requested by the Council) and the site of the repair (home, medical facility, remotely or in

the branch office/workshop). Minimum and maximum days to receive insurance approval/prescription for Medicare Advantage Plans and other commercial policies; no preauthorization is required with Medicaid-only coverage. The preauthorization process is a particular challenge, as delays are completely out of the control of the company and add at least 2-3 days to the process. The purchase order (PO) is often delayed by the wait for the preauthorization. In CT, 60% consumers are dual-eligible and 40% are commercial insurance.

- ii. Toubman clarified some items and pointed out an inconsistency in the data that Racicot acknowledged needed to be corrected. Requested additional percentages be added showing where repairs were made. Garland pointed out the significant growth in number of repairs; Racicot reported they had no explanation for the increases, but they are extremely busy while experiencing staffing shortages, as well. "January Report Summation" was submitted as an addendum to provide additional explanation, although some increase may have resulted from consumers seeking repairs before their deductible was going to increase. They are seeking additional ways of competing with larger companies and are seeking to increase the pipeline of new recruits for in-home and in-shop techs.
- iii. Racicot reported their goal is for 90% compliance and they are hopeful the measures they have put in place will yield the desired results. They have increased staff in the call center, but they lose experienced or recently trained techs to larger, adjacent businesses, and yet have too few new applications of qualified technicians with clean background checks. Tech salaries have been adjusted several times in the last year and open positions are continuously posted.

c. Numotion report by Gilberti:

- i. The printed report was displayed on the screen for Council review. Gilberti emphasized the challenge of having and retaining adequate staff while experiencing a spike in orders; turnover among techs is particularly high and recruitment and retention is a constant challenge. Obtaining parts has been fairly timely when the PO is available. Numotion is currently stocking the top 60 parts allowing for more efficiency and installing used parts for temporary repairs getting the consumer mobile, while awaiting shipment of the new part.
- ii. Gilberti reported they are pleased with the progress that has been made. This data collection has been mainly manually assembled and the hope is to make it more automated.
- iii. Amirault asked about differences between the consumer mix of the two companies. Racicot reported they have a higher proportion of consumers housed in nursing facilities than Numotion. The facilities do sometimes limit the days/times they can make repairs which constrains their schedules. Gilberti indicated he will gather information on their mix of consumers like what has been reported by NSM.
- iv. Garland asked about disparity between business days and calendar days for completed repairs. Gilberti will follow-up and provide clarification.
- v. Morgana requested that Numotion report staffing data like NSM is reporting. Gilberti will send updates immediately after the meeting. They have 1 open position listed, but if they could find more qualified staff,

they will hire them in an effort to outpace attrition. Morgana discussed the use of “routing” practices rather than focusing directly on consumer needs. Gilberti defended their “routing” practices as a way of doing business that increases efficiency. Gilberti stated the goal of reporting higher percentages of compliance and believes that cleaner data will reflect higher percentages that are more reflective of current services. Efficiency has already improved in February and Numotion expects that trend will continue.

- vi. Toubman called attention to some potentially incorrect numbers in the staffing report, especially regarding the number of FT equivalents of staff focused on direct service. Toubman noted that many of the numbers are not in compliance with PA 24-58, and the stated rationale is similar to what was reported in October 2024. The gaps for home repairs are particularly large. Gilberti states he will work hard to scrub the data of “data noise” to reflect more accurate numbers and will send an updated report ASAP (he received this report after 5:00PM the day before the meeting). He explained the staffing challenges that contributed to some backlog in December, but recent staffing improvements have allowed them to reduce the time-to-completion. In terms of staffing, Toubman asked why the company could not shift the assignment of service techs to help close this gap. Discussion ensued.
- vii. Roupp mentioned the results of his search of open positions on the Numotion website and appreciates the detail regarding positions available. When he limits the search to CT, he sees only one job posting that is 100% remote position for the development of operations engineer, although no tech positions are posted.

V. OFFICE OF HEALTH ADVOCATE (OHA) UPDATE:

- a. Jacobson reported that OHA is updating forms on their website to include wheelchair repair, allowing consumers to report any complaints they may have. The processes will recognize the differences in consumer complaints regarding wheelchair repair and the complaints that are regarding insurance coverage or pre-authorizations. As soon as the new forms are live, she will be happy to review those with the Council. OHA/Jacobson is following up on 1 wheelchair complaint in the past month. She is hoping to have individual conversations with members of the Council to become better acquainted and develop a better understanding of the issues and concerns that OHA can help with.

VI. NEW ITEM: DISCUSSION OF HUSKY NEWSLETTER: Mahoney reported the HUSKY Health Spotlight | 2024 | Vol. 8 was circulated last month, and the full newsletter can be accessed here. Members of the Council will be particularly interested in the “New Protections for Timely CRT and Wheelchair Repair” on p. 5.

VII. INSURANCE CHECK IN: Carson stated the final portion of the law went into effect on January 1, 2025, removing the requirement for pre-authorization. Additional suggestions for future legislation will be forthcoming.

VIII. DISCUSSION OF NEW ITEM: NUMOTION NEWSLETTER Morgana asked about an issue included in the Numotion Newsletter that went out in February stating “We can schedule in-shop service more than a week faster than in-home or in-clinic service and in 2024 we completed nearly 50,000 In-Shop Service events with a customer satisfaction

rating 30 points higher than non in-shop service.” Toubman shared the segment on the screen for all to see. Gilberti affirmed the accuracy of that claim because of the efficiency of in-shop repairs. Toubman noted the apparent prioritization of in-shop repairs & methods of staffing to support this practice by the company becomes self-fulfilling. He states a letter from advocates was sent to NSM regarding similar practices and they stopped the practice. Toubman called on Gilberti to state that Numotion will also cease this practice of encouraging consumers to seek in-shop repairs because it is faster, and for them to include only the requirements of the 10 Day period of the law (as it pertains to CT consumers) into the newsletter. Gilberti will take that information back to the company. Racicot clarified that NSM had a voice-mail message they agreed to change, not information that was in print, and further indicated the principle that a company should be free to decide their own business practices and to share with consumers the options available within the confines of the law. Gilberti agreed with the stated principle.

- IX. ANNOUNCEMENT OF TIME AND DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Amirault stated the date and time of the next meeting will be announced.
- X. IX. ADJOURNMENT: MOTION made by Slifka, seconded by Garland. Motion passed by voice vote.

Breanne Clifton

Rebecca McClanahan

Human Services Clerk

Minutes Prepared by Assistant Clerk