

Addressing Misconceptions

About Patients with Substance Use Disorders



**Be a
Recovery
Advocate!**

Did You Know

Living with an SUD is not about lack of willpower, and reoccurrence of use is a symptom of the disease. Like many other chronic diseases, people with an SUD may not adhere completely to their treatment. Developing a plan in advance can increase the time in remission.



Knowledge Domain

When many people think of substance use, they may only see one “type” of person – one who lacks self-control or has an inability to make good decisions. Many believe that if someone is struggling with substance use they must be lower-class ethnic minorities. While being of lower socioeconomic status may be a risk factor in substance use, it does not represent this population as a whole. As a health care provider, it’s your responsibility to understand and address the fact that a person with a substance use disorder can look like anyone.

Recommended Group Activity

Discuss the impact of misconceptions about people with a substance use disorder. What have you learned about stigma and substance use disorder, and how might that affect your personal and work life? Some common misconceptions include:

- There is a standard treatment program for everyone with an SUD.
- SUD is a choice and/or a moral failing.
- Minorities and those of the lower socioeconomic status are at a greater risk for first-time substance use.
- Men are more likely than women to have an SUD.
- A person with an SUD rarely seeks treatment immediately and is more likely to do so once they have hit “rock bottom.”

To Learn More

Misconceptions About SUD Treatment
<http://bit.ly/2ZpVGgo>

Dispelling Myths: Substance Use Disorder
<http://bit.ly/2Hl1rpb>

Delivering an Effective Message

When Communicating with Patients



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Did You Know

The terms “abuse” and “abuser” imply someone has willingly done something wrong. Research shows that this belief can lead to an increase in stigma and reduce the quality of care people with a substance use disorder receive. In particular, the stigma surrounding the use of medication assisted treatment is arguably more harmful than the general stigma about addiction.



Knowledge Domain _____

If you want to connect with your patients and help them along the road to recovery, the way you talk about addiction matters. That means working together, as a staff, to promote a non-stigmatizing environment. Here are a few tips for talking about substance use disorder or other mental health disorders:

- Use medical terminology.
- Use person-first language.
- Avoid stigmatizing terms.
- Humanize the condition.
- Use reliable sources.
- Be respectful.

Recommended Group Activity _____

Identify and discuss the language commonly used to describe addiction or patients with substance use disorder (below) – then develop alternatives that promote recovery. Suggested terms for discussion:

Refused	Resisted
Client believes...	Paranoid
Manipulative	Noncompliant
Unmotivated	Suffering from...
Low functioning	Clean/dirty

To Learn More _____

Revising The Language of Addiction
<http://bit.ly/2ZghQ8N>

Recovery Oriented Language Guide
<http://bit.ly/2NqPzpw>

Abstinence-Based Treatment Works
<http://bit.ly/2ZoxSZX>

Stigma in the SUD Population

Organizational Culture



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Did You Know

There's a cafe in Canada run by two men in recovery whose goal is to create a safe place for others who are in recovery. Addiction and recovery can sometimes lead to isolation, and the dream for these two men is to provide a place that encourages socialization, fosters new relationships, and reduces triggers.



Knowledge Domain

Stigma within the culture of an organization may prevent patients from seeking treatment and prevent providers from screening and treating people with a substance use disorder. The American Society of Addiction Medicine defines addiction as “a chronic disease of brain reward, and without treatment, addiction is progressive and can result in disability or premature death.” When developing organizational culture and policies, try to relate substance use disorder to another chronic condition that requires treatment. People with a substance use disorder are far less likely to discuss their disease if they feel stigmatized.

Recommended Group Activity

Break into small groups. Ask the group a question about organizational culture. After five to 10 minutes, ask each team to share their one word answers and how they came up with that word with the rest of the group. Examples of questions include:

- How does our center define recovery?
- How does our center view harm reduction?
- How does our center view substance use disorder?

To Learn More

The Stigma of Addiction: We Can't Keep Ignoring It
<http://bit.ly/2P5ROky>

What Are the Effects of Stigma?
<http://bit.ly/2L1W3Zl>