

Harm Reduction Includes Abstinence

Curriculum Overview

Drug abuse and addiction are major burdens to our society; economic costs alone are estimated to exceed half a trillion dollars annually in the United States, including health, crime-related costs, and losses in productivity at work. According to a national survey 23.2 million persons aged 12 or older need treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem. Of these individuals, only 10 percent receive treatment.

The majority of treatment facilities in the United States are founded on abstinence only programming. Harm reduction is adamantly opposed by many groups and organizations across the nation that believe the principles promotes use by giving a false impression that there are safe or responsible ways to use drugs. This view is one-dimensional and does not demonstrate a full understanding of harm reduction principles.

Harm reduction does not exclude abstinence as a goal for individuals who are dependent but provides people with more practical choices, based on stages of change, such as limiting their intake. Harm reduction helps to engage people and motivate them to make contact with treatment providers when, and if, they are ready. Harm reduction is a public health approach to the complex problem of drug and alcohol abuse. It addresses harms related to the individual, family, and the community. It has been proven to be effective and is a viable strategy for reducing this major problem in our country.

This curriculum is designed for multidisciplinary groups that include program managers, case managers, substance abuse counselors, social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists, physicians, and any professional interested in addiction recovery.

Presenter Goals:

1. To help participants conceptualize the principles of harm reduction
2. To offer strategies for improving relationships between substance abusers and health care providers
3. To promote this public health perspective through evidenced based practices and strategies

Participants Objectives:

1. Define harm reduction and articulate its underlying principles
2. Discuss sources of controversy associated with harm reduction
3. Identify evidence-based harm reduction strategies and their clinical applications
4. Describe the integration of abstinence-based treatment within a harm reduction framework

Learning Methods:

Power point lecture and class discussion / Case vignettes, handouts and references

Length of training: 4 – 6 hours