



Pacific Southwest

RURAL OPIOID TECHNICAL

ASSISTANCE REGIONAL CENTER

Stigma and Substance Use in Rural Communities

Food, Mood, and Substance Use Symposium

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UCLA Integrated Substance Use and Addiction Programs

June 13, 2024



Acknowledgments:

- ✧ Casey Grover, MD
Prescribe Safe
Montage Health
- ✧ John F. Kelly, PhD, ABPP
Recovery Research Institute
Massachusetts General
Harvard Medical School
- ✧ Opioid Response Network

Stigma For SUD

Stigma from within

- Blame self, feel hopeless

Stigma from recovery community

- Medications vs. “abstinence”

Stigma from clinicians

- Belief that treatment is ineffective

Stigma from outside

- Choice (moral failing) vs. disease



Stigma in Rural Communities

- ✧ Culture
 - More conservative ways of life
 - Importance of faith
- ✧ Social Norms
 - Independence; self reliance
 - Importance of family
 - Tight-knit community dynamics
- ✧ Privacy Concerns
 - Stigma can lead to social isolation
- ✧ All can impact access to limited resources in a rural community
- ✧ Engage local leadership and organizations
 - Churches, schools, community groups, etc.
- ✧ Build on peer support Networks
- ✧ Consider the use of technology

How do patients respond to stigma?

- ✧ WHO study of 18 most stigmatized social problems in 14 countries:
 - Substance addiction ranked number 1
 - Alcohol addiction ranked number 4
- ✧ Stigma associated with poor mental and physical health among people who use drugs
- ✧ Patients who hold more stigmatizing beliefs about SUDs are less likely to seek treatment; discontinue sooner
- ✧ Secrecy (concealing the stigmatized condition) is a common coping mechanism to deal with stigma
 - Contributes to a cycle of shame and avoidance



The Real Stigma of Substance Use Disorders

In a study by the Recovery Research Institute, participants were asked how they felt about two people
“actively using drugs and alcohol.”

One person was referred to as a
“substance abuser”



The other person as
“having a substance use disorder”



“Substance Abuser”

Mr. Williams is a substance abuser and is attending a treatment program through the court. As part of the program Mr. Williams is required to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs...

“Substance Use Disorder”

Mr. Williams has a substance use disorder and is attending a treatment program through the court. As part of the program Mr. Williams is required to remain abstinent from alcohol and other drugs...



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No further information was given about these hypothetical individuals.



Language choice can reduce stigma

“If you want to care for something, you call it a flower, if you want to kill something call it a weed”

- Don Coyhis



Use your words

Use person first language

- People are first, before their diagnosis
- “person with alcohol use disorder” vs “alcoholic”
- “patient with schizophrenia” vs “schizophrenic”
- “patient with diabetes” vs “diabetic”



Use your words (2)

- Use person first language and avoid terms with a judgment
 - In front of a client
 - In front of providers and other agencies
- Ask for permission, and gently educate your colleagues when they use stigmatizing language

Addictionary: <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/>



If we want addiction destigmatized,
we need a language that's unified.

The words we use matter. Caution needs to be taken,
especially when the disorders concerned are heavily
stigmatized as substance use disorders are.

Stigmatizing vs. Affirming

Stigmatizing Language

Abuser, Addict, Alcoholic

You're Clean

You're Dirty

Drug Abuse

Relapse

Substance Abuse/Misuse

Drug

Lapse

Affirming Language

A person with a substance use disorder

You tested *negative* for substances

You tested *positive* for substances

Substance Use

Recurrence

Substance Use Disorder

Medication OR psychoactive substances use

Resume OR Experience a recurrence



Tips for Providers

- Remind yourself how much effort it took for your client to show up at all.
 - Show appreciation for the time, energy, money, etc. it took for them to be present.
- When clients share topics that may be stigmatized, thank them. Acknowledge it takes strength to be vulnerable.
- Reassure clients that they are not going to be judged
- Reassure clients that you are just trying to help them
- If you're honest in those statements, it can change how you engage with people



Take home points

Stigma hurts clients in multiple ways, including changing their behavior, avoiding healthcare, receiving poorer healthcare, and increasing their risk of dying



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