

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS **IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS... FOR** **MEDICAL EMPLOYEES**

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Healthcare workers are typically proponents of healthy living and have lower rates of smoking and higher rates of exercise.**
 - But they actually misuse drugs and alcohol as much as the general population and have higher rates of opioid misuse.
- **Healthcare workers can suffer from substance use disorders just like anyone else.**
 - And their situations can be unique due to the high-stress and intense nature of many of their jobs and their easy access to addictive drugs.
 - For example, nurses, patient care assistants and Certified Nursing Assistants can work long hours caring for sick people in what may be an understaffed facility.
- **According to the National Library of Medicine, alcohol and drug misuse among doctors is a persistent problem as well.**
 - Studies show that emergency medicine physicians, as well as psychiatrists, and anesthesiologists are at an especially high risk for developing a substance use disorder.
 - This is due to their knowledge of and access to potentially addictive drugs.
- **Nurses' access to controlled substances often contributes to a higher incidence of dependence on them as well.**
 - The rate of substance misuse among nurses is similar to the general population, ranging between 6% and 8%.
 - But one-third of nurses who showed signs of substance misuse problems had a full-blown substance use disorder.
- **In fact, a study found that approximately one-third of all disciplinary actions taken against nurses are drug or alcohol related.**

- **But there are tools that are available to healthcare institutions that can help with this problem.**
 - The American Medical Association has a sample policy that addresses the need for healthcare employees to seek care for their own burnout, anxiety, depression and substance-related disorders without fear of backlash.
 - The policy also seeks to reduce the stigma of seeking treatment for these problems.
- **It also addresses both the ramifications of a false report and the dangers to patients of not reporting an impaired healthcare worker.**
 - The AMA provides guidelines for reporting a colleague who might be suspected of having a substance use disorder as well.
- **The term “substance use disorder” is defined as...**
 - An overuse of alcohol.
 - Misuse of over-the-counter medications and prescription drugs.
 - The use of illegal drugs.
- **It can also involve inhaling (“huffing”) chemicals such as solvents, lighter fluid and glue to get “high”.**
- **Substances that produce a “high” affect how the central nervous system functions.**
 - Depressants, such as alcohol and sedatives like Ambien, slow down brain activity.
 - Stimulants, including methamphetamine, amphetamine and cocaine can increase heart rate, blood pressure and respiration.
- **Other substances that can create a “high” include...**
 - Opioids such as heroin, morphine, fentanyl, methadone and oxycodone.
 - Psychedelics, such as LSD and “Magic Mushrooms”.
 - Marijuana.
- **Like marijuana, there are also other drugs that can affect people in multiple ways.**
 - Ecstasy, for instance, is both a stimulant and a psychedelic.

- **A person's personality and ability to function if they have a substance use disorder is directly affected by the drugs that they take.**
 - Cocaine or other stimulants can make people overconfident, hyperactive and even reckless.
 - This significantly increases the risk of them having an accident on the job.
 - And for healthcare workers, the use of stimulants can be disastrous if it results in mistakes in patient care.
- **Alcohol, the sleep aid Ambien and other depressants create a dangerous "sedating effect" that can slow a person's reaction time and prevent them from thinking clearly.**
 - Since people frequently feel "good" when they are using alcohol and drugs, they often don't recognize that they are actually dangerous to themselves and others.
- **Additionally, the "residual" effect of a substance can cause a person to have an accident hours or even days after they last used it.**
 - So what a healthcare worker with a substance use disorder does on their "own time" can still affect them, their coworkers and their patients.
- **Marijuana, or Cannabis, is still classified as an illegal drug under Federal law.**
 - But since it is widely used for medical purposes and is legal for recreational use in many states, it has become more commonplace and accepted.
- **Also known as "weed" or "pot", marijuana does have beneficial uses. It can be used to...**
 - Ease chronic pain.
 - Control nausea and vomiting for chemotherapy patients.
 - Restore a sick person's appetite.
 - Help with seizures.
- **But while it can be beneficial, marijuana also comes with risks that can affect a person's health and life.**
 - Since it is a drug that affects people differently, marijuana is classified as a depressant, a stimulant and a psychedelic.

- **Like alcohol, marijuana can...**
 - Impair short-term memory.
 - Reduce the ability to concentrate.
 - Affect coordination.
 - Slow reaction time.
- **As you would expect, as marijuana has become more widely accepted, more and more people are using it.**
 - But today's marijuana is stronger than ever before, and people can become addicted to it much more easily.
 - In fact, the Federal government says that 1 in 10 people who use weed will become habitual users.
- **Alcohol is by far the most commonly misused of all drugs. In the United States alone...**
 - There are over 60 million binge drinkers.
 - More than 40% of workplace accidents are caused by people drinking on the job.
 - More than 13,000 people die each year in automobile accidents involving alcohol impairment.
- **Impairment starts with the first drink, making it extremely dangerous to have even a “quick nip” and operate vehicles or equipment.**
 - So if a coworker who appears to be impaired is attempting to drive or use heavy equipment, notify your supervisor immediately.
 - If you aren't on the job, call the police.
- **But be careful when approaching a person who is impaired by alcohol or drugs.**
 - They may not act rationally and might even become violent.
 - You also need to be prepared to get medical help for a coworker who has “overdosed”.
- **The most commonly overlooked depressants in the workplace are fumes from paint, aerosol cans, glue, gasoline and similar products.**
 - Breathing in or “huffing” these “inhalants” not only affects your brain but can permanently damage your lungs and respiratory system as well.

- **According to the National Institutes on Drug Abuse, more than 75% of drug overdose deaths involve an opioid.**
 - Opioids are drugs like heroin and Oxycodone.
 - In fact, opioid-involved deaths have been increasing significantly in recent years.
 - This can be largely attributed to the appearance of the powerful opioid fentanyl in the illegal drug trade.
- **Fortunately, thanks to the drug naloxone, an opioid overdose doesn't always have to result in death.**
 - Naloxone can rapidly reverse an opioid overdose and is now a medication that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration.
- **While they are not used as frequently, illegal stimulants such as cocaine, methamphetamines and crystal meth are all extremely addictive drugs as well... with terrible side-effects.**
 - For example, someone who uses crystal meth can have a tremendous amount of energy, but they lose the ability to think rationally and act safely, which can create an especially dangerous situation in a healthcare facility.
 - Since crystal meth is made from highly toxic and corrosive materials, users can also lose their teeth from smoking it.
- **On the other hand, people who use opioids experience persistent drowsiness and “fuzzy” thinking.**
 - So in a healthcare facility, where everyone needs to be alert, users of stimulants or depressants can put themselves and patients at serious risk.
- **People often focus on drugs like opioids and illegal substances when talking about “substance use disorders”.**
 - But all drugs have the potential to be misused, including prescription and over-the-counter medications.
- **Many people assume that these drugs are safe because they are legally available.**
 - But over the counter and prescribed drugs can also become addictive and result in a substance use disorder as well.

- **Prescription drugs that have the greatest potential for misuse include...**
 - Stimulants, like the amphetamine
 - Adderall.
 - Opioids, such as Oxycodone and medications containing codeine.
- **Over-the-counter drugs that can cause problems include...**
 - Cough syrup containing dextromethorphan (DXM), which can be used to get high.
 - Allergy medications, whose misuse can cause drowsiness, blurred vision and increased heart rate.
- **A substance use disorder of any kind is a serious illness that can cost someone their job, savings, friends, family and freedom... and a doctor or nurse their license.**
 - It can also destroy your health, cause mental health issues... even be fatal.
- **What someone with a substance use disorder does while impaired can also endanger coworkers, patients and anyone else that they come into contact with.**
- **Few people set out to develop a substance use disorder.**
 - Many people who misuse alcohol start as casual drinkers.
 - Other people become drug dependent through recreational experimentation or taking opioids that have been prescribed for pain after an accident or surgery.
 - Even people who are in the medical community and have more knowledge of the potential danger can take too many prescription or over-the-counter medications.
- **Stress, depression, anxiety and personal tragedy can all drive a person to use alcohol or drugs as well... to help them “escape” from their problems.**
 - Chronic physical pain and mental health illnesses can also lead a person to “self-medicate.”
- **Studies also indicate that substance use disorders are more likely to occur because of risk factors such as...**
 - A genetic predisposition.
 - Easy access to drugs.

- **A person might go down the road of misusing drugs or alcohol when they experience...**
 - A death in the family.
 - A broken relationship.
 - Job loss.
 - Serious financial difficulties.
- **But alcohol or drugs never really provide a solution to our problems.**
 - In fact, they only make the situation worse.
- **One thing that is common to many people with substance use disorders is that their use will “escalate” over time.**
 - Someone who misuses substances can eventually build up a tolerance to them.
 - So they need to keep using more and more of them to get the same effect.
- **This “tolerance” may make the person feel that they're in control of their substance use.**
 - But it's actually a warning sign that they are becoming dependent on their drugs or alcohol.
- **“Psychological dependence” comes first.**
 - This is when someone can't help wanting a substance, so it increasingly becomes the focus of their lives.
- **Eventually, “physical dependence” will occur as the person's body also becomes dependent on the substance.**
 - At this point, if the user doesn't get their daily dose, they'll begin to feel physical symptoms of drug “withdrawal”.
- **Misusing any substance can lead to psychological dependence.**
 - While physical dependence usually results from using cocaine, heroin, opioids or alcohol.
- **People who have developed a “dependency” often can't or won't see what is obvious to the people around them.**
 - This is called “denial”.
 - So if anyone expresses concern about your drug or alcohol use... listen to them.
 - Because if you were really in control, they probably wouldn't be talking to you about it.

- **As you've probably guessed, substance use disorders don't "play favorites".**
 - When the circumstances are "right", anyone, of any age, can develop a substance use disorder.
 - To stop that from happening to us, we all need to monitor our behavior, and be honest with ourselves.
- **To prevent developing a substance use disorder...**
 - Never use illegal drugs.
 - Don't self-medicate.
 - Remember that just because a drug might be legal, doesn't mean it's safe.
 - Only take prescription medicines that have been prescribed by a reputable doctor.
 - Follow the directions for all of the medications that you use.
 - If you drink, don't overdo it.
- **Dependency on alcohol and drugs is a disease.**
 - As with many illnesses, a person's heredity can play a part.
 - If there is a history of substance use disorders in your family, you need to be especially careful.
- **There are no known cures for drug or alcohol use disorders.**
 - With treatment, a person can recover.
 - But they will need support to prevent a relapse.
- **Keeping substance use out of their facilities should be a top priority for all healthcare institutions.**
 - Which is why so many of them have formal drug and alcohol policies.
 - Your facility's policy can help to keep you and your coworkers safe, by providing simple guidelines for everyone to follow.
- **Employees are expected to be completely drug-and alcohol-free when they report for work.**
 - They must remain that way throughout their workday.
- **Everyone should also adhere to the company's drug and alcohol policy when they are...**
 - Representing the company at social gatherings.
 - At facility-sponsored events.
 - Are "on call".

- **In addition to listing behaviors to avoid, your facility's drug and alcohol policy will outline the steps that you should take if you are struggling with a substance use disorder.**
 - It will also contain information on what you should do if you suspect that a coworker may be using drugs or alcohol.
 - Remember, keeping quiet about substance use in your workplace is dangerous!
- **Unless someone with a substance use disorder is reported, they will never receive the help that they need.**
 - Then they will continue to be a threat to the health and safety of everyone at the facility.
- **When an employee with a substance use disorder is reported to management, the facility will then investigate the situation.**
 - Anyone who is suspected of being impaired on the job will immediately be removed from any type of task that could endanger themselves or others.
 - They will then be interviewed by someone who is trained to handle substance use disorders.
- **When they are confronted, some people who have substance use disorders immediately ask for help.**
 - But if a suspected user denies that they are impaired, a “reasonable suspicion” alcohol or drug test can be given.
- **Urinalysis is a common form of pre-employment and random drug and alcohol testing.**
 - Employee “oral fluids” testing is also approved for use by the Department of Transportation (DOT) and for all federal employees and companies with federal contracts.
- **Oral fluid testing offers a variety of advantages for employees and employers alike.**
 - The tests take less time, are less likely to be tampered with and eliminate the need for private restrooms and “same gender” collection arrangements.
- **A company can also perform periodic alcohol and drug tests to uncover substance use that might otherwise go unnoticed.**

- **As a healthcare professional, failing a substance use test can put your job and license at risk.**
 - But it's important to note that OSHA does not allow a facility to conduct drug tests on employees as a form of retaliation when the worker has complained about unsafe work conditions.
- **OSHA has also stated that employers' policies should limit post-incident testing to...**
 - Situations in which employee substance use is likely to have contributed to the incident.
 - When the test could accurately identify the impairment caused by drug use.
- **When an employee has a drug or alcohol substance use disorder, the situation will typically be handled like any other serious illness.**
 - For nurses with a suspected substance use disorder, the employee is typically placed on leave until an investigation can be conducted.
- **If a drug or alcohol test comes back positive in most states, the nursing leadership team and human resource leaders are required to report the situation to the Board of Nursing (BON) and the local police.**
- **For doctors, treatment of substance use disorders can be handled by a Physician Health Program (PHP).**
 - A PHP is a confidential resource for physicians, other licensed healthcare professionals or those in training who are suffering from substance misuse disorders or other potentially impairing conditions.
 - It is part of the Federation of State Physician Health Programs (FSPHP).
- **PHPs coordinate the detection, evaluation, treatment, continuing care and monitoring of physicians who are dealing with these situations.**
- **Some healthcare facilities also have "Employee Assistance Programs" (EAPs) that offer resources to help workers recover from substance use disorders.**
 - You can help a coworker overcome a substance use disorder as well, by being understanding and encouraging their rehabilitation efforts.
- **People who are trying to recover from drug or alcohol substance use disorders need as much support as they can get, from...**
 - Family.
 - Friends.
 - Coworkers.

- **It's also crucial for them to seek help from people who have been down the road of a substance use disorder and found another path to follow.**
 - That's why support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous are so important.
- **"Cognitive Behavioral Therapy" coaching and the opioid treatment method "Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD)", which combines FDA-approved medications with counseling, can also help.**

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **Never underestimate the dangers of drugs and alcohol.**
- **Know your facility's drug and alcohol use policies... and follow them.**
- **If you think you may have a substance use disorder, talk to your Supervisor and ask for help.**
- **Inform your supervisor immediately if you suspect a coworker is impaired by drugs or alcohol.**
- **If you drink, do it in moderation... and don't drive.**
- **Never use illegal drugs and remember that even legal drugs can be dangerous.**
- **Follow the directions for all of the medications that you take.**
- **By doing your part to ensure that you and your coworkers are drug and alcohol-free, you can help to create a safer and more productive workplace... for everyone!**