

DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE DISORDERS
IN HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENTS...
FOR MEDICAL MANAGERS
AND SUPERVISORS

COURSE OUTLINE

- **Substance use disorders are a worldwide problem.**
 - In the United States alone there are roughly 60 million binge drinkers, and almost 40 million drug users.
 - 60% of the people who are battling drug or alcohol use disorders have jobs.
- **Healthcare workers are five times more likely to misuse opioid medications than the general population.**
 - Since they often have easy access to these drugs, they can also quickly become dependent on them.
- **“Easy access” isn’t the only reason healthcare workers can develop substance use disorders.**
 - Stress and long hours can be a “natural” part of their jobs.
 - And too often they turn to drugs or alcohol to help them push through their day or to de-stress during a hectic shift.
- **But when healthcare workers turn to these substances, they don’t only harm themselves.**
 - Precision is key when working with patients, administering medicine, or operating medical equipment, where a mistake can have disastrous results.
 - And substance use disorders can dull your employees’ senses, impair their decision-making, and slow their reaction time.
- **An employee with an alcohol or drug problem can...**
 - Decrease productivity.
 - Create a hostile work environment.
 - Damage your company’s good name.
 - Undermine your efforts to make your company a safer place for everyone to work.

- **Substance use disorders in the workplace account for...**
 - 65% of on-the-job accidents.
 - 50% of workers' compensation claims.
- **As a result, substance use disorders cost American companies more than \$80 billion every year through...**
 - Decreased productivity.
 - Absenteeism.
 - Turnover.
 - Healthcare costs.
 - Workplace accidents.
 - Workers' compensation.
- **If an employee with a substance use disorder makes a mistake or causes an accident on the job, their coworkers may have to pay as well.**
- **An accident can also result in lawsuits that can directly jeopardize your own career and financial well-being.**
 - The family and friends of an employee with a substance use disorder can pay a heavy emotional price too.
- **So to keep everyone safe, you need to be able to recognize and control drug and alcohol use in your workplace before accidents or injuries occur.**
- **Unless you're looking for them, you might not see the drugs and alcohol that are at your facility at all.**
 - So it pays to know what "substances" people are likely to use on the job.
- **The most commonly misused substance, both on and off the job, is alcohol.**
 - It's a "legal intoxicant", so it's easily available.
- **Workers who are drinking can be very clever in hiding it. They may...**
 - Carry a flask.
 - Stash a bottle in a filing cabinet.
 - Spike the coffee they bring to work in their thermos.
 - Mix alcohol with soda, juice or other beverages.
- **The next most popular substance used in the workplace is marijuana.**
 - While at one time pot was illegal throughout the country, it has now been legalized in a number of states for both recreational and medical use.

- **But changes in marijuana's legal status do not change its effects on the user, or on workplace safety.**
 - Pot is usually smoked in either small pipes or rolled into “joints,” which you may see in the work area of someone with a substance use disorder.
- **Healthcare workers also commonly misuse prescription medication.**
 - 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.
- **Tranquilizers, codeine, OxyContin and other prescription drugs are all substances that are often misused.**
 - Many of these medications are chemically similar to heroin and other narcotics.
 - This makes them just as addictive and deadly as illegal drugs.
- **A drug that is also commonly misused is the painkiller Fentanyl, a powerful, lab-made opioid.**
 - Fentanyl can be consumed knowingly or unknowingly.
 - It can be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.
 - So a lethal dose can be very small.
- **Workers can also turn to stimulants like cocaine or amphetamines as a “substitute” for rest.**
 - And that can be disastrous if it results in mistakes in patient care.
- **To make sure that employees are drug-free and sober, you need to understand the laws that focus specifically on substance use disorders in the workplace.**
 - These regulations are designed to protect employees’ health and safety.
 - They affect people who have substance use disorders, while at the same time safeguarding their privacy and civil rights.
- **OSHA’s “General Duty Clause” requires employers “to provide working conditions which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm”.**
- **Since substance use disorders are considered a “recognized” hazard you must ensure that an employee who appears to be using drugs or alcohol does not pose a danger to themselves or others.**

- **Companies have to adhere to the Department of Transportation’s “Procedures for Workplace Drug and Alcohol Testing Programs” when they employ...**
 - Truck drivers.
 - Dispatchers.
 - Mechanics who have “safety-sensitive” jobs.
- **This regulation requires that employees in these types of positions be given random alcohol and drug tests.**
 - It also states that if there is a “reasonable suspicion” that they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they must be immediately removed from their “safety-sensitive” tasks and be given a substance use test.
- **Even though not all healthcare workers are required by law to take drug tests, you can make it part of your policy.**
 - This is an especially good idea for workers who have easy access to potentially addictive medications.
- **At the same time, since substance use disorders are considered illnesses, you must be careful that you don’t violate an employee’s privacy or other civil rights.**
 - For instance, medical privacy laws can often prevent you from questioning a worker on their medication use.
- **However, you can insist that an employee tell you if they are taking medications that could cause “drowsiness” or impairment if they...**
 - Drive company vehicles.
 - Operate equipment.
 - Perform tasks that require them to be completely alert.
- **Many workers hesitate to ask for help because they are worried about legal or professional repercussions.**
 - That’s why the American Medical Association has a sample policy your facility can adopt.
 - It addresses the need for healthcare employees to seek care for their own burnout, anxiety, depression and substance-related disorders without fear of backlash.
- **If your company employs 15 or more people you must also comply with the “Americans with Disabilities Act.”**
 - This says that you may not “discriminate” against a worker who is trying to overcome a substance use disorder.

- **You also may not discharge or otherwise punish a person with a substance use disorder without giving them a chance to overcome their problem by entering a substance use disorder treatment program.**
 - So it's important for you to keep these "employee rights" in mind when you are dealing with substance use disorder issues.
- **To help prevent employee substance use disorders, a company needs to create a work environment that encourages sobriety.**
 - That's why all companies, regardless of their size, should have a written "Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace" policy in place.
- **The policy should clearly state what behaviors are prohibited, such as...**
 - Consuming alcohol immediately prior to or during the workday.
 - Possessing, selling, distributing or using illegal drugs.
 - Operating equipment or motor vehicles while using medications that cause drowsiness or other impairment.
- **It should also require that regular education sessions be held for employees, managers and supervisors.**
 - So everyone can better understand substance use disorders and know what they can do to help prevent them.
- **The policy should be tailored to "fit" your company's specific needs as well as the type of work that your employees perform.**
 - For instance, your drug and alcohol policy should spell out that employees should not work with patients or operate equipment if they have been drinking or using drugs of any kind.
- **Substance use disorder policies should also specify what happens if a person breaks the rules. Consequences typically include...**
 - Suspension from "safety-sensitive" duties.
 - Mandatory participation in a substance use disorder rehabilitation program.
 - Termination for serious offenses.
- **The policy should also explain the steps that should be followed when a worker is suspected of being under the influence of drugs or alcohol.**
 - For example, your company may conduct various forms of drug and alcohol testing to identify employees with substance use disorders.

- **Many companies also provide Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).**
 - These help workers and their families deal with substance use disorders and their related issues.
- **If an employee does have a substance use disorder, it is important to refer them to a program that has been created specifically for healthcare professionals.**
 - Many state boards require higher levels of intervention and treatment for healthcare workers because they have a higher chance of relapse.
 - Workers should also be treated by medical professionals outside of their facility, who they do not know, to avoid any bias during treatment.
- **It's important that everyone who works in your facility be aware of all of this.**
 - So make sure all your people, including temporary employees and contract workers, have a copy of the company's drug and alcohol policy.
 - And provide one to all new hires as well.
- **Opioid and prescription pain medication misuse are common concerns in healthcare environments.**
 - So you might also take a look at what you could do to control their use through the healthcare benefits programs your company offers.
- **For example, you can limit coverage of opioid prescriptions to seven days.**
 - Or you could work with your pharmacy benefits management company to manage the use of prescription pain medications.
 - If you decide to do this, make sure that all of your employees are aware of the policy and its purpose... to protect them and others in your facility.
- **Every company should provide regular training sessions on the subject of substance use disorders.**
 - This helps employees understand how disorders can occur and the hazards that come with them.
- **Topics should include...**
 - The types of substances that can often become addictive.
 - The effects of drugs and alcohol on work performance, safety, health and personal life.
 - The signs of drug and alcohol use disorders.
 - How to report substance use disorders in the workplace.
 - The resources that are available to help employees overcome drug and alcohol use disorders.
 - A review of the company's drug and alcohol policy.

- **If the policy also includes provisions for drug and alcohol testing, be prepared for some push-back from employees.**
 - Many people feel that testing questions their character.
 - Others believe it's a violation of their privacy.
- **Your best approach is to ensure that everyone understands...**
 - Why testing is a part of the company's drug and alcohol policy.
 - That the goal is to keep all employees safe, healthy and productive on the job.
- **Substance use disorder tests are usually given in five types of situations...**
 - "Pre-employment" tests are used to screen out illegal drug users before they're hired.
 - "Reasonable suspicion" tests are given when there are indications that a worker is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.
 - "Post-accident" tests are used to determine if substance use contributed to an accident that occurred in the workplace.
 - "Return-to-duty" tests verify that workers who have been removed from "safety sensitive jobs" due to substance use can safely resume their normal job functions.
 - "Random" tests, which are given without notice and by "luck of the draw," ensure that employees are not violating the company's drug and alcohol policy.
- **Urinalysis is a common form of pre-employment and random drug and alcohol testing.**
 - "Oral fluid" 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. These tests...**
 - Take less time.
 - Are less likely to be tampered with.
 - 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.**

- **And government regulations require random substance use tests for...**
 - Truck drivers.
 - Pilots.
 - Other transportation industry employees who have “safety-sensitive” jobs.
- **You should be aware that OSHA does not allow a company to conduct drug tests on employees as a form of retaliation when they have brought unsafe work conditions to the attention of their company or OSHA.**
- **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.
 - The test can accurately identify the impairment caused by drug use.
- **Drug and alcohol testing can make employees think twice about using drugs or alcohol on the job.**
 - But testing is not infallible.
- **There are many types of drugs, and no more than a few can be tested for at one time.**
 - Alcohol and some other drugs can only be detected for a few hours after they are used.
- **Employees with a substance use disorder have also been known to switch out their urine sample with someone else’s that doesn’t contain drugs or alcohol.**
 - So it can sometimes be a challenge to determine if an employee is really “under the influence”.
 - But if you suspect someone is, you have to try.
 - People’s health and well-being depend on it.
- **How do you spot employees with a substance use disorder?**
 - Don't expect them to make it easy for you.
 - Most of the time they'll do their best to hide their behavior from you.
 - But one reasonably effective way to detect a substance use disorder is to look for anything "unusual" in how a person behaves.

- **How they act will depend on what they're "using".**
 - Depressants, such as alcohol, marijuana and tranquilizers, slow down brain activity... making a person sluggish.
 - Stimulants, including cocaine, crack and methamphetamine cause a person to become abnormally active.
 - Narcotic analgesics or "painkillers" such as OxyContin, heroin, morphine and Fentanyl numb the user and make them more relaxed.
- **Drug use can also result in extreme mood swings.**
 - For instance, someone who is high on cocaine may be giddy, energetic and extroverted.
 - But as the drug wears off, they can rapidly become angry, depressed and withdrawn.
- **How much of a substance a person has "used" will also influence how they behave.**
 - For instance, a single glass of wine tends to relax most people and make them more “sociable.”
- **But everyone reacts differently when they drink too much.**
 - Some people fall asleep.
 - Others become the “life of the party.”
 - Some may get anxious, depressed, angry... even violent.
- **If you do notice a worker behaving oddly, you can start looking for more “concrete” signs of a substance use disorder.**
 - One way to do this is to look at their job performance.
 - Employees with substance use disorders usually have a lot of difficulty functioning efficiently on the job.
- **You should be keeping written performance reports and safety records for all of your employees.**
 - These reports can help you to deal with everyone's performance or safety issues, regardless of the cause.
 - But they can also reveal patterns in an employee's behavior that may indicate a substance use disorder.
- **Remember, since these notes can affect an employee's livelihood and may be reviewed by others, you should always stick to facts.**

- **If you smell alcohol on their breath, for example, record what you observed along with the date and the time.**
 - But don't write down that they were “drunk.”
 - That may be what you think, but it's not something you know.
- **When these “incident reports” establish a pattern of questionable job performance, you have a solid basis for raising the issue of “working under the influence” with the worker.**
- **As a manager you are representing your company.**
 - So it’s important how you proceed when an employee appears to have a substance use disorder.
 - While you definitely have a responsibility to maintain a safe and productive workplace, you must also respect the rights and the privacy of the employee.
- **It's always a good idea to consult your company’s drug and alcohol policy to refresh your memory of what you're supposed to do.**
 - Trying to "wing it" can cause you, and your company, a lot of grief.
- **Never accuse the employee of having a substance use disorder! It’s not your job to...**
 - Be a police officer.
 - Diagnose a worker’s substance use disorder.
 - Function as their therapist.
- **How the situation should be managed will depend on several things.**
 - The employee’s apparent level of impairment.
 - Their job functions.
 - The potential for them to have an accident.
- **In most cases a company drug and alcohol policy will direct you to report problems to...**
 - Someone in Human Resources.
 - A manager or supervisor who has received in-depth training on the subject.
- **In some cases you may need to report an employee to the American Medical Association, if you believe their behavior violates the AMA Code of Conduct.**
 - The association provides guidelines for reporting a worker who might be suspected of having a substance use disorder.

- **But any time an impaired employee's actions could endanger themselves or others, you should intervene immediately.**
 - For example, workers who drive vehicles or operate machinery should never be permitted to perform these tasks if they appear to be “under the influence.”
- **If it is determined that a worker does have a substance use disorder, they will usually be required to enter a rehabilitation program.**
 - This may be done through the company's EAP (if one exists) or with an outside group.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **In your efforts to create a drug and alcohol-free workplace, it's important for you to respect the rights and privacy concerns of your workers.**
- **All employees should have a copy of your company's drug and alcohol policy.**
- **Everyone in your facility should be provided with training on substance use disorder prevention, including temporary employees and contract workers.**
- **You need to be able to recognize the “signs” of drug and alcohol use yourself.**
- **If you suspect that a worker may have a substance use disorder, your company's drug and alcohol policy can provide guidance in how you should proceed.**
- **Any time an employee's actions could create a dangerous situation, you must intervene immediately.**
- **Now that you know the signs of substance use disorders and understand what you can do to help prevent them, you can help make your facility a safer and more productive place to work... for everyone, every day!**