

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

COURSE OUTLINE

- **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.

- **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 someone with a substance use disorder does on their “own time” can still affect them and their coworkers on the job.
- **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.
 - 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 the workplace, where everyone needs to be alert, users of stimulants or depressants can put themselves and others 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.**
 - 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 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.
 - Also, people who don't normally drink or use illegal drugs might not realize that over-using prescription or over-the-counter medications is a problem.
- **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 the workplace should be a top priority for all companies.**
 - Which is why so many of them have formal drug and alcohol policies.
 - Your company’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 company-sponsored recreational and other events.
 - Are “on call” or awaiting assignment.
- **In addition to listing behaviors to avoid, your company’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 your company.
- **When an employee with a substance use disorder is reported to management, the company 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.**
- **Government regulations require random substance use tests for...**
 - Truck drivers.
 - Pilots.
 - Other types of transportation industry employees who have “safety-sensitive” jobs.
- **Failing a substance use test will not necessarily result in disciplinary action.**
 - However, the employee will be required to enter a drug or alcohol rehabilitation program.
- **It’s important to note that OSHA does not allow a company 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.**
 - A leave of absence can often be arranged, or in some cases the employee can be assigned alternate work while they are recovering.
- **Remember, your company's objective is to get rid of substance use disorders... not employees.**
 - In most cases only people who refuse treatment or have caused a serious accident will face suspension or termination.
- **Some companies 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 company'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.**
- **Use proper respiratory protection when working with "inhalants."**
- **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!**