



Module 6: Substance Use

Part 1: Overview of Substance Abuse

I am Martha Romney and I am presenting on substance abuse. This module focuses on the healthy people 2020 objective to reduce substance abuse to protect health, safety and quality of life especially for all children. Due to the broad scope of substance abuse and magnitude of the issues, this module focuses generally on abuse of alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs. Other modules are dedicated to tobacco, mental health at injury and control issues. The overall goal for the substance abuse under healthy people 2020 is to reduce substance abuse to protect the health, safety and quality of life for all, especially children.

Substance abuse is defined in healthy people as a set of related conditions associated with consumption of mind and behavior altering negative behavioral and health outcomes. The use of tobacco, alcohol, drugs and other chemicals have the potential to become addictive. Addiction is to find as chronic, relapsing brain disease, characterized by compulsive seeking for the use of that substance despite the harmful consequences, including changing in the brain structures, mechanisms and functions. Addiction is considered a developmental disease that may start in childhood or in adolescence. Factors which influence vulnerability to addiction are an individual's biology, genes, social economic and physical environments, access to the substances and the impact of the substance on individual brain mechanisms.

Why is there an oppressing need for a national focus on prevention and treatment of substance abuse? Recent data reflect that over 20 million persons, age 12 and over, are classified as having substance dependence or substance abuse in the past year. That represents 8% of the population. Recent data also reflects that illicit drug use has increased between 2008 and 2010. There has also been an increase in use of marijuana as well as pain relievers and prescription drug abuse which increased from 1.4 million to 1.8 million between 2004 and 2011. There are also concerns with prevalence of underage drinking and driving. It is estimated, by 2020, behavioral health disorders will surpass all physical diseases as a major cause of disability worldwide and it's not without a cost.

The latest estimate of annual societal cost of substance abuse in United States is over \$500 billion. The patient protection and affordable act has provisions that will expand and enhance substance abuse and mental health



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resources for prevention and treatment and we will explore some of those provisions later. Many government agencies collect and track this data.

Why is substance abuse such a complex issue? The classification of abuses includes a variety of different substances with different chemicals and properties and effects. Some of these substances are prohibited, others are regulated and the legalization and regulation differs by scope, target population, provisions, enforcement and penalties, which at time are inconsistent across the levels of government between federal and state, and with agencies and departments within those governments across the states.

Substance abuse has historically been considered immoral or criminal behavior rather than a brain disorder. Often with punitive rather than therapeutic treatments offered. Existing criminal laws have mandated incarceration as a punishment with slow movement to including mental health services, either as a part of the incarceration or in lieu of.

Historically, there has been less public and professional education and funding directed to preventing, diagnosing and treating substance abuse resulting in siloed substance abuse and mental health care. Due to these and other factors access to inform and affordable care has not received the attention that medical conditions have.

In the past decade though, issues concerning access to care, qualifications of mental health providers, lack of coordination of mental health and medical care and parity of care have received more attention with legislation including the affordable care act, which are addressing many of these as well as the medical parity act. Other national initiatives have been considering reforms to the criminal justice system in recognition of substance abuse as a disorder.

These challenges raise interesting policy issues that need to be considered. Whether to consider substance abuse as a criminal behavior rather than a health condition. Whether the focus of policies should be on public safety versus public health or a combination thereof, and the multiple public and private sector entities addressing substance abuse, where services are not integrated into medical care and there is less funding for substance abuse and mental health services.



These are some of the agencies and departments at the national level with specific policies and initiatives on substance abuse. Part of the role of these different agencies is the on-going of collection of data to be able to identify, define and quantify issues and problems as part of their assessment to inform strategies and plans. These agencies conduct and publish the results from these and many other surveys and these are some of the primary sources of data consulted.

We will now look at some of the recent data reflecting the prevalence and trends of substance abuse. Over 20 million individuals, 12 years and above, are classified as having substance abuse or substance dependents in the past year. In the most recent national drug survey issued by the SAMHSA organization. Of these individuals, 14.1 million individuals acknowledge the use of alcohol over the course of the past year; 3.9 million acknowledge use of illicit drugs.

Data shows that marijuana is the number one illicit drug among teens. Alcohol has been determined to have the second highest dependence rate. Of greatest concern is the lack of awareness by 95% of those with substance abuse.

We will look at some of the trend data for specific substances. The trends for the period 2008 to 2011 reflect an increase of illicit drug use including marijuana, prescription drug misuse and abuse other than cocaine. This graph speaks to the impact of use at an early age. In 2011, among adults who reported alcohol abuse or dependence in the past 12 months, identified beginning to drink at age 14 or younger. This is consistent with research that has identified the impact and consequences of early initiation of use of substances in young adults, 15 years and younger.

The value of these data, even with inherent limitations, indicate where policy and prevention initiatives should focus. In response to a question about reasons individuals did not seek treatment, lack of financial resources for care was the highest rational. With health reform provisions, issues associated with cost in access to treatment should be reduced.



Let's review some of the impacts and consequences of substance abuse across several domains; health, economic and societal. Substance abuse has tremendous impact on health. It is associated with increased rates of motor vehicle accidents, personal injuries, suicide, blackouts and many other health conditions. There are increased rates of injury, violence, abuse, contraction and spread of infectious disease as well as documented associations of exacerbation of chronic illnesses including cardiovascular, respiratory, diabetes, stroke and hepatitis.

There are also serious mental health consequences. Of the nearly 33% of the people with all mental illnesses, 50% with severe mental illnesses have substance abused as well. One-third of individuals who abused alcohol and more than one-half of drug abusers have mental illness. There are challenges with dual diagnosis defined as people with mental illness and alcohol and/or drug problems. The treatment for dual diagnosis is far more complex than for either of the conditions alone.

There are also tremendous societal impacts from substance abuse. Individually, it diminishes the individuals potential. It devastates families, neighborhoods and communities. There is an impact on society through increased rates of crime, homicide, domestic violence, child abuse and social and academic problems. There is also a tremendous economic impact associated with substance abuse.

Estimates of \$600 billion as the annual cost associated with alcohol, illicit drugs and tobacco abuse are related to health care crimes and lost productivity. Lost work productivity includes loss of jobs, absenteeism, presenteeism, workers' compensation, disability and the cost to employers and employees for addressing that gap in labor. The economic cost of alcohol have been estimated to be \$30 billion for health care, \$235 billion as overall cost. And for illicit drugs, \$11 billion for health care and overall cost estimated at \$193 billion per year.

Now that we have identified impacts of substance abuse, what are some of the barriers to addressing substance abuse? Research and practice have identified barriers to reducing prevention substance abuse. Barriers to progress and addressing and reducing substance abuse are associated with stigma. A stigma exists at the societal level, governmental and healthcare delivery level as well as among communities and individuals. There is societal misunderstanding and misperceptions about substance abuse. Historically,



treatment has been fragmented, fragmented between treatment for abuse and mental health treatment as well as fragmented treatment for substance abuse mental health issues and medical care.

There also has been inadequate funding for substance abuse services and research, and these all have resulted in challenges to access to care. Other barriers include skepticism about efficacy of treatment. Society's disparate views on treatment versus punishment for addressing substance abuse.

We have an existing legal structure for addressing substance use, misuse and abuse. There is often futility or hopelessness of successful treatment and at societal level, there are attitudes for tolerance for youthful experimental with substances. Other barriers include medication as treatment in the absence of behavioral interventions. Patients with substance abuse can be very challenging. There can be relapses in addiction and there is documentation of recidivism.

The clinical training and experience for substance abuse and mental health issues has been limited in scope and there has also been tremendous industry marketing and political power which has influenced government policies and regulations. For over a decade, the federal government has dedicated extensive time and resources to addressing substance abuse in the form of developing policies, strategies and supporting interventions.

The key national prevention and drug control policies build on those interventions and evidence to promote the public's health and safety and some of the current strategies focus on building education, monitoring, disposal and enforcement. These include expanding and enhancing prevention, screening and integrated treatment programs, expanding access, quality coordinated informed care and treatment, advancing law enforcement strategies and criminal justice reform to appropriately deter, treat, rehabilitate and/or prosecute as appropriate.

And engaging and implementing innovative community based safety initiatives to educate and support prevention and law enforcement strategies. Some of the strategic approaches include national strategic plans across federal entities, coordinating clinical and mental health leadership to address the issues of coordinating care, implementing the provisions of the affordable care act that have direct impact on services and access to



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care for individuals experiencing substance abuse, additional money for research and future initiatives, improved education of health care professionals so that health care providers, regardless of their experience with mental health and substance abuse treatment, have the ability to screen patients and consumers who may be at risk or experiencing substance abuse problems and refer them to the necessary services.

There will be a coordination with non-governmental entities to support funding and initiatives as well as taking a more aggressive and targeted approach to policies for tobacco, alcohol and drug use. Initiatives will continue to reform the criminal justice system for substance abuse and implementation of school based initiatives, including educational programs and drug testing.

We will now look at the impact of the affordable care act on substance abuse and mental health services. As a result of the enactment of the affordable care act, there will be expanded insurance coverage for those who are uninsured, through Medicaid and through private insurance. The inclusion of mental health and substance abuse care has been added to essential health benefits that are covered under the affordable care act. There is a requirement that mental health and substance abuse services be covered at parity with medical and clinical conditions. There is also a requirement that a minimum number of mental health drugs be included in each drug category or class and there is increase funding for substance abuse services.

As a result, individuals needing care and treatment will have easier access to care. There will be better integration of substance abuse services and to general health care, and as we have mentioned, there will be a more coordinated and integrated care systems and programs accessible to individuals with substance abuse and mental health issues. There will be an expansion of substance abuse treatment providers through funding for education and a shift away from the residential and standalone programs towards outpatient programs.