Stigma Busters

How we can reduce mental health and substance use stigma and discrimination with our patients and colleagues?

1. **KNOW YOUR FACTS…. about mental health and substance use disorders.**
   - Educate yourself about these. Learn to discern facts from myths.
   - Consider visiting the following websites:
     - [http://tinyurl.com/ASAM-Article](http://tinyurl.com/ASAM-Article)

2. **BE SENSITIVE… our bias and attitudes influence our words and behavior.**
   - We all grow up with certain prejudices and judgmental thinking.
   - We can change our prejudices with awareness and knowledge.
   - See the people you serve as unique human beings, not as labels or stereotypes.
   - See the whole person and not just their mental illness or substance use; they have many other personal attributes that do not disappear just because they also have these disorders.

3. **WORDS HAVE POWER… choose them carefully and avoid labels.**
   - The way we speak to and about others can affect the way other people think and speak.
   - Don’t use hurtful, derogatory, or judgmental language such as:
     - addict
     - crackhead
     - junkie
     - nutty person
     - druggie
     - crazy person

4. **USE “PERSON FIRST” LANGUAGE… remember that I am not my illness.**
   - Using person first language in speech and writing, such as:
     - a person who uses drugs
     - a person with depression
   - This demonstrates that you are not defining a person by their drug use or mental health issue. It reminds us and others to see the whole person and not just the disease/illness.
5. **EDUCATION HELPS ALL OF US… use your knowledge and skills to educate others.**
   - Find opportunities to pass on facts and positive attitudes about people with mental health and substance use problems.
   - If your friends, family, co-workers, or even the media present information that is not true, challenge those myths and stereotypes.
   - Let others know how their negative words and incorrect descriptions affect people with behavioral health problems and can keep people from getting the help they need.

6. **BE POSITIVE… seek strength and offer hope.**
   - People with mental health and substance use problems make valuable contributions to their homes, communities, and society.
   - Their health problems are just one part of who they are.
   - Divert focus away from the negative stories. Recognize, applaud, and share the positive stories.
   - Help those with the problems see their strengths and gifts.

7. **SUPPORT PEOPLE… these problems cannot be solved in isolation.**
   - Treat people who have mental health or substance use problems with dignity and respect.
   - Think about how you’d like others to act toward you if you were in the same situation.
   - If you have family members, friends, or co-workers with substance use or mental health problems, support their choices and encourage their efforts to get well.

8. **BE INCLUSIVE… and advocate for inclusion.**
   - People with mental health and substance use problems have a right to take an equal part in society. Let’s use our roles and skills to make sure that happens.
   - It is against the law and violates human rights to deny people access to things such as jobs, housing and health care - which the rest of us may take for granted.

9. **BE TRAUMA INFORMED… understand that substance misuse and mental health challenges are often linked to trauma of many types.**
   - Seek out and utilize trauma informed models of care.
   - Learn how your practice environment or your protocols for admission, treatment, and discharge may re-traumatize or trigger someone with a history of trauma.
   - Educate yourself and others about the types of trauma.

10. **EMBRACE CHANGE… and incorporate current best practices.**
    - Be aware of new treatment options such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) and utilizing the skills of peer recovery specialists.
    - Don’t forget about non-pharmacological interventions such as:
      - art and music therapies
      - meditation
      - yoga
      - aromatherapy
      - mindfulness
      - acupuncture / acupressure

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