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Herman Kalsi
University of Vermont

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Substance Abuse Amongst High School and College-Aged Students



HERMAN KALSI
UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE C/O 2016
FAMILY MEDICINE ROTATION #6
DANBURY CONNECTICUT
DECEMBER 2014
PRECEPTOR: ROB MASCIA MD

IN COLLABORATION WITH:

DANIEL PEARSON
YOUTH HEALTH SERVICE CORPS
PROGRAM COORDINATOR
NORTHWESTERN CT AHEC

TRICIA HARRITY, MS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
NORTHWESTERN CT AHEC

An alarming trend of substance abuse and need for intervention in students



- **National Trends:**

- Substance abuse among young adults is hardly new.
 - ✦ However, the progression of prescription drug overdoses, in addition to the spike in binge drinking, has been alarming.
- Among adults ages 18-25, abuse of prescription drugs is second only to abuse of marijuana.
- Hundreds of thousands more of today's college students are abusing prescription drugs than was the case in the early 1990s; the number of students using marijuana daily has more than doubled to approximately 4 percent.
- Almost half of full-time college students binge drink or abuse prescription drugs, and almost a quarter of those college students meet the medical definition of having a problem with substance abuse or a dependence.
 - ✦ This is three times the rate of the general population.

- **Danbury Trends:**

- Huge increases in opiates and heroin have been noted by many within the community.
- Alcohol has been the biggest substance abused within the Danbury School District
- Approximately once a week the Danbury school nurses get called for suspicion of students under the influence of drugs
- One local substance abuse program states that in November 2014, 60% of its attendees reported a primary addiction to alcohol

Public health costs of substance abuse and associated consequences

- **Estimated overall total cost of substance abuse in US: \$600 billion annually**
 - Failure to reach peak potential in school: Students that are involved in substance abuse are less likely attend classes, pay attention in classes, complete assignments on time and participate in school oriented activities. This can prevent students from not only achieving academic success but can also prevent them from identifying hobbies and extracurricular activities of interest.
 - ✦ In the Danbury School District, students found under the influence are suspended from school for 10 days. This suspension can be decreased to 5 days upon participation in school sponsored drug education programs.
 - Loss of employment: Employees that are found to have certain drug metabolites in their urine are terminated from employment. Loss of employment at the student level takes away spending money, the chance to learn financial responsibility and countless opportunities to grow, self explore and develop as young adults.
 - ✦ It was estimated that over 1/3 of Danbury High School students have some type of job that provides them income .
 - Health Care: Side effects of substance abuse can lead to medical emergencies that require prompt stabilization and transportation to the hospital. Grave complications can lead to prolonged stays in intensive care units where not only the cost of treatment increases but as does the probability of acquiring hospital related infections, further contributing to the health care costs.
 - ✦ At Danbury High School, the school's registered nurse gets called at least 5 times a month for students that are suspected of being under the influence of drugs. In some instances this has led to ambulance transports to Danbury Hospital's Emergency Department.
 - Violence: Drug abuse has led to increases in crime and unnecessary violence.
 - ✦ Although fights in the Danbury School District are no more common than within other school districts, it is reported that an overwhelming majority of fights take place off school grounds. The Danbury School District continues to invest more and more in School Resource Safety Officers to help keep violence within the district to a minimum.

Community Perspective and Support for an Intervention (4A)



[Name Withheld], RN, BSN
Health and Nursing Services Coordinator
Danbury Public Schools

“Alcohol has always been a big problem within our school district. We have also seen increasing numbers of students using marijuana in creative ways such as putting the drug in cookies, brownies and Rice Krispy treats. However, we have recently began seeing an alarming increase in the number of students using heroin”

“There are over 3100 students at our high school. The students involved with drugs do a decent job at making their activities hidden”

“At least once a week the nurses have to respond to a student suspected of being under the influence of drugs”

“Unless a student gets suspended or transported to the hospital it is often difficult for parents to realize that their child may have a problem with drugs”

“We are seeing drugs spread towards younger and younger students”

“We are fortunate enough to have drug education programs, social workers, psychologists and safety resource officers within in our school district but they can only do so much”

Community Perspective and Support for an Intervention (4B)



[Name Withheld] CPC, LADC, NCC
Clinical Coordinator Outpatient Services
Midwestern Connecticut Council of Alcoholism

“The Danbury, New Milford and Torrington areas have seen increases in the amount people using prescription pain killers and heroin. The vast majority of people start off abusing pain killers and then move onto heroin as it is cheaper and easier to get”

“Students sometimes have parties where they take medications from their parents medicine cabinets, pool them together, and then randomly ingest handfuls of them”

“We have multiple outpatient and inpatient treatment options that are geared towards psychoeducational learning, therapeutic groups and relapse prevention”

November 2014 MCCA program Statistics

Attendees whose primary addiction is the following:

60%: Alcohol 12%: Heroin 9%: Marijuana 6%: Other Opiates 5%: Cocaine
3%: Crack 2%: Benzodiazepines 1%: Amphetamines 1%: Methamphetamine 1%: Other

“Keep in mind that these only represent the attendees PRIMARY addiction. Many attendees are battling addiction with multiple substances”

Public Intervention and Methodology



- The purpose of my project was to learn more about the drug problem specifically amongst adolescents in the Danbury area. Once this knowledge was obtained, I brought it to Danbury High School with the hope of spreading awareness before another graduating class enters college and risks becoming statistics of drug abuse themselves.
- 90 Minute Interactive Presentation Session with a 12th grade class at Danbury High School
- Topics of Discussion Included:
 - Trends in substance abuse
 - Dangers of substance abuse
 - ✦ Medical complications, legal implications, societal impact
 - Recognizing substance abuse
 - Available resources and support

Results and Responses



- The students thoroughly enjoyed the interactive session as well as the matching pre/post presentation activity
 - Fifteen 12th grade students participated
 - ✦ They were all interested in attending more, similar interactive learning sessions
- Through the course of the interactive activity, each student was able to talk about at least one thing that they had learned during the 90 minute presentation that had not already been mentioned by another student
- The teacher and school nurse appreciated the support of their community members

Evaluation of Effectiveness and Limitations



In order to help me gauge the effectiveness of my intervention, I requested voluntary participation in a pre and post presentation matching exercise

- **Pre-presentation Matching Activity: 100% Participation**
 - Class Average: 62.3% Range of Correct Answers: 0-5
 - ✦ 7/15 students correctly answered 5/5 questions
- **Post-presentation Matching Activity: 100% Participation**
 - Class Average: 96.0% Range of Correct Answers: 3-5
 - ✦ 14/15 students correctly answered 5/5 questions
- **Limitations:**
 - Only 15, 12th grade students were able to participate. Being able to reach more students could greatly add to the overall goal of decreasing substance abuse amongst students
 - This was a one time, 90 minute intervention. Longitudinal outreach events and programs could help overcome this limitation
 - The background information was only obtained from community leaders and counselors. Receiving input from the students could help us learn more about the drug abuse problems amongst students
 - College students could not participate in this activity since they were on winter break

Recommendations for Future Interventions



- Conduct an identical interactive learning presentation for multiple class grades, including college students, in an auditorium in order to reach more of the student body
- Interactive Small Groups: This will allow students to come together and brainstorm potential solutions, policies and programs that they feel could be implemented at their school to help keep their peers away from drugs. Perhaps if students are given more a say in the policies that are geared towards them, we may have better success in the fight against drugs.
 - This should be conducted with assistance from the PTA, school administration, safety officers, and guidance counselors.
- Thoroughly train approximately 4 members of each high school class about the specifics of drug abuse pertinent to the community and have them serve as liaisons between the student body and faculty. They can be responsible for hosting afterschool events, evening programs and monthly activities geared towards helping their classmates acquire the knowledge to better prepare themselves for college with respect to substance abuse.
 - These events and training sessions should be fully sponsored by the school district.

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