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# **An Introduction to Alcohol Use Disorder and Motivational Interviewing at Henry Abbott Technical School in Danbury, CT**

Laura D. Leonard and Dylan Hershkowitz

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# Problem Identification and Description of Need

- Alcohol abuse and alcohol use disorder is a problem that often manifests in young adulthood and can persist for life.
- High school is a time when many teens first come in contact with alcohol and other substance use
- A knowledge of warning signs and the pathology of alcohol abuse and dependence is important for identification of unhealthy use
- Early identification of an unhealthy relationship with alcohol can lead to earlier interventions and treatment with decreased personal and societal cost

# Problem Identification and Description of Need

- Multiple clinical trials have demonstrated that motivational interviewing is a "useful clinical intervention" and is "an effective, efficient, and adaptive therapeutic style worthy of further application".
- This technique has been integrated into many medical school curriculums, however, is not widely taught in other health professional programs including nursing school, physical therapy school and health technology programs like that at Abbott Tech High School.
- For this reason, we felt it would be valuable to introduce this technique to a group of adolescents who are planning to pursue careers in the health professions and allow them time to practice the strategies that are essential to motivational interviewing.

# Public health cost and unique cost considerations in host community

- The prevalence of alcohol use among teens is similar between CT and the US with 36.7% of CT teens reporting alcohol use within the past 30 days compared to 34.9% of teens nationwide
- Teenaged alcohol use increases throughout high school with 21.7% of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in CT vs 51.3% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reporting alcohol use within the past 30 days.
- 24.6% of adults over 18 reportedly engaged in binge drinking over the past 30 days
- 17% of men and 8% of women will meet the criteria for alcohol dependence at some point in their lifetimes
- 88,000 people die from alcohol related deaths in the US annually, the 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of preventable death
- Alcohol misuse related problems cost the United States \$223.5billion in 2006
- Motivational interviewing is a low cost intervention that was designed to be a brief intervention and is normally delivered in two to four outpatient sessions.

# Community Perspective on Issue and Support for Project

- **Rebecca Sirowich- Dept. Head Health Technologies Program at Abbott Technical High School**

“Our students learn about soft skills and interviewing and professionalism each year of our program but are not taught motivational interviewing. They have no exposure substance abuse other than learning about unhealthy behaviors during topics of growth and development.”

“Students learn about nutrition, exercise and risk reduction along with primary prevention techniques, however, we do not discuss substance use/abuse in depth.”

“One area that is not well covered in our curriculum is college searching and the difference between different programs and different careers in health.”

- **Susan Cribari- Social Worker, Guidance Department, Abbott Technical High School**

“I believe substance abuse including alcohol is the number one problem that needs to be addressed, because we continue to have a problem in this area and nothing seems to be working to curb student use.”

“What students really need is how to calm themselves (without substances) in order to focus their energy on whatever they are doing- being mindful of each moment. I find a lot of students can't get out of their own heads and are constantly worried about something that already happened or are anxiously ruminating about what is to come. This may be at the root of our substance use problems.”

# Community Perspective on Issue and Support for Project

- **Social Worker and Former Alcohol and Substance Use Counselor**

“This is more of a problem in college and beyond but the earlier you recognize a problem the better off you will be”

“Motivational interviewing and understanding the stages of change is important in helping someone change”

- **Friends of Recovery Educator and Former Alcohol and Drug Counselor**

“Students in the school are concerned about the behavior of their friends. If you think a friend is having trouble with substances, you want to talk about it and what you can do.”

“Heroin is the next big thing. Bigger than Alcohol but not getting attention in High Schools because of the politics”

# Intervention and Methodology

- Classroom information session on Alcohol Abuse, Dependence, and Alcohol Use disorder presenting key features to identify
- Classroom information session on key components of Motivational Interviewing
- Demonstration of motivational interviewing
- Breakout session for students to practice motivational interviewing on standardized patients with alcohol use disorder
- Debrief and question answering following motivational interviewing practice session



# Student Responses to Presentation and Workshop

- "I didn't know there was a difference between abuse and dependence"
- "I didn't know the importance of asking open ended questions and allowing your patients to tell their story"
- "I didn't know what motivational interviewing was and how effective it is as a tool"
- "I learned that relapse is a normal stage of change and that you should tell your patients that so that they don't feel like they have failed"
- "I also didn't know that people could be in different states of change and that you can help them move through the different phases"
- "I learned the importance of asking about the concerns of other people like friends and family and using those concerns to start a conversation about changing behavior"

# Evaluation of effectiveness and limitations

- Student awareness of and ability to identify risky alcohol use increased during the motivational interviewing workshop.
- Student comfort and success in motivational interviewing improved greatly throughout the workshop with particular emphasis on a non-judgmental approach, asking open ended questions and encouraging patients to make a plan for change.

## **Limitations:**

- 1) The controlled setting of a practice classroom is not equivalent to a social setting with peers, or a real patient encounter.
- 2) The relatively small number of student participants (n=10) limited the scope of the intervention,
- 3) A one time workshop without follow-up sessions will likely result in reduced overall efficacy in teaching alcohol use disorder identification and effective motivational interviewing.
- 4) Students who elected to participate in the optional afterschool workshop are probably not the students at highest risk for risky behaviors including alcohol use.

# Recommendations for future interventions/projects

- Larger sessions on alcohol and substance use disorder and motivational interviewing for students beyond those interested in healthcare as a career.
- Additional practice sessions for students to have the opportunity to continue building their motivational interviewing skills.
- Peer practice with motivational interviewing in addition to work with standardized patients. ons on alcohol use and substance use into the health education
- Integrating motivational interviewing into standard health tech curriculum.
- Integrating additional sessicurriculum which is required for all students and may help capture the most at risk students.

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# Interview Consent Form

- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This project is a requirement for the Family Medicine clerkship. It will be stored on the Dana Library ScholarWorks website. Your name will be attached to your interview and you may be cited directly or indirectly in subsequent unpublished or published work. The interviewer affirms that he/she has explained the nature and purpose of this project. The interviewee affirms that he/she has consented to this interview. Yes  X  / No.

(Rebecca Sirowich)

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(Susan Cribari)

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(David Dodge, Social Worker and Former Alcohol and Substance Use Counselor, name withheld)

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(Bob Bavaqua, Friends of Recovery educator and Former Alcohol and Drug Counselor)