Harm Reduction

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Harm reduction (HR) refers to the policies, programs and practices that aim primarily to reduce the adverse health, social and economic consequences of the use of legal and illegal drugs without necessarily reducing drug consumption.
Harm Reduction

- An approach used to reduce harm and consequences associated with high risk activities, participation and practices.
- Best achieved through support without assumptions or judgement.
- Recognizes limitations for rescuing or saving from behavioral choices.
- Meets persons where they are, presents options, alternatives to reduce risk.
Historical Context

- United States- long tradition of moralistic condemnation of intoxication with psychoactive drugs including alcohol.
- The demonization of the psychoactive drugs associated with stigmatized racial/ethnic minority groups
- Moralistic intolerance of intoxication and stigmatization of minorities led to demonization
- Criminal law was viewed as the most appropriate means for controlling drug use.

Des Jarlais 2017
Historical Perspectives from HIV

- Discordant Public Health messages between Federal Government and the States resulted in higher infection rates.
- States implemented harm reduction programs in opposition to attitudes of federal government.
- Feds had greater resources for implementing HIV prevention for PWID and for funding research.
- Initial opposition to harm reduction by Feds delayed widespread implementation of harm reduction programs for many years.
HARM REDUCTION MEANS
Respect, dignity, compassion
Harm Reduction

• Accepts risk taking as normal human behavior
• Appreciates behavioral change is more successful when choices consider reduction rather than elimination of behaviors
• Identifies range of risks with Substance Use Disorders (SUD)
• Offers encouragement toward protection
Principles of Harm Reduction

- Accepts presence of illicit drug use, chooses to reduce harm vs condemn/ignore
- Understands SUD as complex continuum of behavior
- Focus is safety
- Well-being of individual/community is greatest measure of success
- Endorses service provision and resource accessibility
- Affirms individual is primary agent for reducing harm in self and others
HARM REDUCTION MEANS Saved my life.
Harm Reduction

• Challenges policies and myths about risk taking behavior
• Challenges polices and practices that isolate individuals and blocks access to needed services
• Provides resources and supports to those at risk
• Proactively educates individuals and communities
Harm Reduction

Myths
- HR programs promote and enable drug use
- It is illegal to give out needles
- "More needles will be found in my community."

Facts
- HR supports and encourages Informed choices re. SU safety
- Distribution of needles and equipment is not a crime
- HCP and police understand value of HR strategies
- With distribution/access to needles < likely to be unsafely discarded.
The Preservation of Life in the Midst of Dangerous Settings

• “I want to save your life I don’t want to fix you”
• “Preservation of life and the preservation of health and keeping people safe, bicycle and motorcycle helmets, seat belts, naloxone, safe roads, anything that encourages a person and community to live”

Daily Harm Reduction
Harm Reduction Examples

- Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT): Dozens nicotine replacement studies demonstrate greater cessation rates by 1.5 times to 2 times compared with placebo or no additional aid.

- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT): Studies support opioid substitution effectively decreases illicit use, decreased HIV risk behaviors, criminal activity, morbidity/mortality.
Harm Reduction Considerations

- Start wherever the client is and stay there.
- Stay with client as they experience difficulty navigating change.
- Don’t become impatient with their process.
- Recognize your discomfort sitting and witnessing a person making disastrous decisions and the resulting damage incurred.
- Other than bona fide child endangerment, people have right to make own decisions - even very bad decisions.
- Hold on for the ride and try not to become overly anxious or angry.
- Dealing with your own sense of powerlessness, anxiety, worry, or disgust may be the most challenging aspect of all.
Harm Reduction & Abstinence

Continuum of Excess, Moderation, and Abstinence

—Any steps toward decreased risk are steps in the right direction—
Evolving and Integrating Information

Available patients needed good counselors SUDs care delivering access preferred services involved chronic

Times connect use help Telehealth sobriety sense

Traditional pressures making substance schedules decisions addiction disorders

Outside settings making locations models service

Treatment alleviates makes daily clients limited

Courtesy B. Lessin M.Ed. CAADC
Harm Reduction and Abstinence

- HR and Abstinence based programs enhance coping methods and increase social supports as use decelerates or ceases.
- HR services can preserve life during active drug use and reduce burdens on self, family, and community.
- Integrated HR and Abstinent principles offer engagement and support for SUD and recovery.
- Both offer approaches to reaching different populations and reaching the same individuals in different stages of SUD and recovery.
- Resistance and ambivalence are natural, not pathological responses to internal and external pressure to change deeply engrained behaviors.
- Resistance and ambivalence are reduced when people have real choices and are empowered to choose.
Principles of Using Harm Reduction

1. Have a nonjudgmental attitude
2. Emphasize individuals ability to care for himself or herself
3. Use short-term pragmatic goals and a scale of behaviors to achieve the goals
4. Provide information about risk for consequences and illnesses associated with behavior
5. Focus on concrete risk behavior change and connect those with the individual’s reality
6. Provide different options to reduce risk
7. Provide a supportive environment (professionals, family, peers, etc.)
8. Have a team of experienced professionals involved as resources for implementing harm reduction

(Costigan, Crofts & Reid, 2003)
Harm Reduction Celebrates

Every Positive Change!!
Documentary on NYC Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center shows how HR services like needle exchange programs not only reduce drug related harms for communities and individuals, but also how programs are gateways of connection for drug users with mental health services, SUD treatment, and much more.
References

- Lessin, B., Bridging the Gap from Abstinence-Based Addiction Treatment to Harm Reduction Treatment: My Personal Journey.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse – InfoFacts. Provides information on various drugs and related harms.
References

• Des Jarlais DC,. Harm reduction in the USA: the research perspective Harm Reduction Journal; 2017