

A changing landscape of substance use and misuse: synergising professional education

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Aim

- To highlight the current format of undergraduate clinical education using nursing as the exemplar
- To describe the current information on trends in 'established' forms of substance misuse
- To describe emerging 'new' substance misuse trends
- To describe attitudes of health professionals towards substance misuse
- To draw conclusions as to needed changes in undergraduate education

Typical areas of educational focus in curriculum – the example of undergraduate nursing

Distribution by programme

- Mental Health Nursing most likely to have a dedicated module but not universally so;
- General Nursing has some content threaded through various modules
- Midwifery some threaded through programme
- Intellectual disability.
- Total dedicated content in the non-mental health programmes ranges between 2 to 6 hours of content over four years

Typical areas of educational focus in curriculum

– the example of undergraduate nursing

- Overview of classification, epidemiology and co-morbidities
- Significant focus on alcohol misuse and treatment approaches
- Alcohol related physical problems and psychological disorders and social damage
- Psychoactive drug use, tolerance, neuro-adaptation and dependency
- Drug use in special groups: pregnancy; ethnic minorities, prisoners, HIV
- Efficacy of therapeutic relationship risk management in a range of clinical and community environments
- policy/prevention/law

Current Trends in Treated Problem Drug Use in Ireland

- The number of cases entering drug treatment each year, reported to the NDTRS increased by 52%, from 5,176 in 2005 to 7,878 in 2010
- The majority of problem drug users were male and in their twenties.
- 50% of the new cases entering treatment between 2005 and 2010 had started drug use at or before the age of 15 years.
- The proportion of new cases aged under 18 years has increased since 2007 and was 16% in 2010

Identified Problem Substances

- Opiates (mainly heroin) were the most common problem drugs reported for all years.
- The number of cases reporting cannabis as their main problem substance increased significantly over the reporting period (from 1,039 in 2005 to 1,893 in 2010).
- Following a steady increase to a peak in 2007, the number of cases reporting cocaine as their main problem substance decreased
- Head shop compounds were reported as a main problem substance for the first time in 2009 (17 cases), with the number increasing significantly to 213 cases in 2010.
- Among new cases, benzodiazepines accounted for the highest proportional increase among the five most commonly reported problem substances
- Cannabis, alcohol, cocaine and benzodiazepines were the most common additional problem drugs reported by all cases entering treatment.
- The very large number of cases reporting alcohol as an additional problem substance highlights the strong links between alcohol and illicit substance use.

The Interface of Alcohol Misuse with Drug Misuse

- 42,333 cases presented with alcohol as a main problem substance, accounting for 52.7% of all cases treated for problem substance use
- Almost one in five of those treated for alcohol as a main problem substance also reported using at least one other substance.
- Most common substances were Cannabis, Cocaine, Benzodiazepines and Ecstasy.
- By the time they were 16 years old, half of all those treated for problem alcohol use had commenced the illicit use of drugs

Educational Conclusions to Be Drawn from Current Trends

- The use of more than one problem substance continues to present a challenge to the treatment services. Impact on A and E admissions in terms of diagnosis and treatment and which drug to treat for are issues that need to be explored in clinical education.
- Poly substance misuse needs to be addressed in terms of impact on addiction treatment regimes and addiction management
- The clear spread and increase in treated drug use throughout the country reflects not only the extent of problem drug use but also an increase in treatment availability and compliance with the NDTRS.
- The increase in the total number of people requiring drug treatment services, including previously treated cases returning to treatment, is a strong indication that problematic drug use remains a pressing issue, and presents **complex and multiple challenges** to those providing treatment.
- The increasing size of the proportion of treated drug users under 18 means a greater focus on child and adolescent management

Emerging Trends - Internet Retailing

- User consumptive choices are grounded in availability, perceptions of legality and safety, curiosity and perceived quality of drug outcomes
- The Internet is increasingly viewed as the driver of contemporary drug markets by the promotion of 'drug shopping' in web based retail outlets and settings as well as providing increased opportunities and accessibility for user communication and information exchange
- Purchase of anxiolytics, appetite suppressants and sexual stimulants through online pharmacies
- The online promotion of 'drug shopping' and user information networks is of increasing public health and law enforcement concern.
- New substances being developed specifically for the internet market
- An avenue for the sale and distribution of counterfeit medications
- Anecdotal evidence that there is a rise in deaths resulting from use of untested / new pharma products due to non recognition of substances by clinicians

Emerging Trends in Novel Psychoactive Substances

- Recent research has underscored the emergent use of Human Enhancement drugs (HED) for functional outcomes relating to human appearance and abilities.
- Very little is known about the health impacts of HEDs (in the short and long term) which are often untested, banned and adulterated, with little adequate or accurate guidance on safe use, diagnosis relating to abuse or approaches to health education or successful treatment.
- There is anecdotal reporting of injecting use of Melanotan in the traveller community and sharing of needles (potential Hepatitis and HIV transmission)
- There is anecdotal reporting of steroid injecting in the student population for muscle building

Emerging Trends- 'Respectable' Addiction

- The repeat prescribing of codeine products for pain management, and user displacement patterns between prescribed, OTC and web sourced codeine is of public health concern.
- Prolonged use strongly associated with depression and dysphoric mood states and Medication Overuse Headaches and a host of life threatening physical problems
- There is a 'blurring between therapeutic and problematic use' which serves to compound the individual's problematic codeine use
 - Users conscientiously disobeying product instructions so as to experience a drug induced euphoric effect from the codeine present;
 - Users who become addicted to codeine based products, are aware of their dependence but continue to use them in response to cravings and to avoid withdrawals;
 - Users who are unknowingly misusing codeine based products within the recommended limits but frequently and regularly using to treat drug-induced withdrawal symptoms such as headache

Educational Conclusions to be Drawn from Emerging Trends

- The need to educate health professionals about new and emerging chemical compounds and implications:
 - for symptoms diagnosis
 - management and overdose
- Need to develop education about the role of the internet in relation to distribution and promotion in relation to health education and impact on success of treatment
- Need to educate health professionals in relation to recognition of non therapeutic use of codeine and non prescription / over the counter products

Health Professionals' Negative Attitudes

- Research consistently highlights training need to reduce health professional negative stereotypical opinions and attitudes toward problematic drug users.
- Reluctance to work with drug dependents is grounded in perceived lack of skills and expertise, workload, concerns around safety and aggressive patients, and attitudes to drug users
- Howard and Chung (2000), [6] argue that these views may affect the therapeutic relationship between patient and care-provider.

Negative attitudes of health professionals

- Substance Abuse Attitude Survey distributed to 108 members of the MDT in one psychiatric service with a response rate of 56.4%
- 44.3% said that heroin is so addictive that no one can really recover once s/he becomes dependent
- 25% said that drug dependence is not a treatable illness
- 34.4% said that a person dependent upon drugs or alcohol who has relapsed several times probably cannot be treated

(Petrani and Bergin, 2011)

Renewing Curriculum Content

- Emphasis on tackling and changing attitudinal prejudices
- Greater emphasis on the management of young person substance misuse
- Recognition and management of 'new' forms of misuse and dependency
- Digital awareness in relation to health promotion
- Greater emphasis on poly substance misuse
- Community detoxification