Words Matter: Language and Stigma Reduction

December 16, 2020
3:00-4:00pm Eastern
(2pm Central, 1pm Mountain, 12pm Pacific)
Introduction to the APR CoE

Technical Assistance Requests will be accepted early 2021 at:
www.PeerRecoveryNow.org
Housekeeping Details

• Technology

• Questions or Comments

• Participant Feedback - evaluation
Words Matter:
Language and Stigma Reduction

Presented by
Keegan Wicks, NCPRSS
Faces & Voices of Recovery
Learning Objectives

Participants will be able to:

• Identify the words we use and how they affect individuals with SUD
• Distinguish research on common terminology
• Identify and debunk commonly held beliefs and myths
• Apply strategies to eliminate stigmatizing language through storytelling
• Perform a language audit to remove stigma
The Impact of Our Words
Stigma

- a relationship between an attribute and a stereotype that assigns undesirable labels to a person
- discredits a person or a group
- marginalizes affected individuals
- diminishes achieving full potential
Stigma is Visible and Invisible

From within
  • Blame self, feel hopeless

Recovery community
  • Medications vs Abstinence

Clinicians & medical providers
  • Treatment is ineffective

From general public
  • Choice/moral failing vs disease
Types of Stigma

Public
- Attitudes and feelings towards PWUD or SUD

Institutional
- Policies, practices, and cultures of orgs, systems

Self
- Internalization
Effects of Prejudice, Discrimination & Stigma

Excludes people with MH and SUD from activities that are open to other people:

- employment
- housing
- health care (including MH/SUD TX)
- social acceptance
- social activities
Effects of Prejudice, Discrimination & Stigma

- Prejudice and discrimination often become internalized by people with MH/SUD
  - lower self esteem because
  - guilt/shame

- Prejudice and discrimination cause people with MH/SUD to “keep a secret”
  - avoid getting help
  - don’t seek treatment
  - MH/SUD less likely to decrease or end
Looking Ahead

• Be mindful of stigma and discrimination, long before people look for recovery support services

• Engage with dignified language across the spectrum, including PWUD health, prevention, public health, and harm reduction settings
The Words We Use Are Critical

“Words are important. If you want to care for something, you call it a ‘flower;’ if you want to kill something, you call it a ‘weed.’”

- Don Coyhis, Founder, White Bison, Inc and the Wellbriety movement
Research on Common Terminology
In a study, individuals read similar case studies that used different language to make recommendations of care.

When the subject was described as a ‘substance abuser’ punitive action was recommended.

When described as a person ‘having a substance use disorder’ therapeutic action was recommended.

This study was replicated with clinicians at two different mental health conferences. Results were the same.

(Kelly, J.F., Westerhoff 2010)
Science of Language

- General public polled for biases towards PWUD/SUD
- Bias for people described as
  - Addict
  - Alcoholic
  - Medication-assisted treatment
  - Relapse
- Positive association toward people described using
  - Long-term recovery
  - Pharmacotherapy
  - Medication-assisted recovery
  - Recurrence of use

When is it appropriate to use stigmatizing language?

- Medical, Behavioral Health staff, Substance Use Counselors can be inclined to use stigmatizing language to be more approachable to persons with SUD
- Important to use dignifying language.
### When is it appropriate?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recovery Dialects</th>
<th>Mutual Aid Meetings</th>
<th>In Public</th>
<th>With Clients</th>
<th>Medical Settings</th>
<th>Journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addict</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance Abuser</td>
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<td>STOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opioid Addict</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relapse</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
<td>STOP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medication Assisted</td>
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<td>STOP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
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The Power of Positive Language

- Using positive language increases public support for:
  - Effective substance use and mental health disorder policies
  - Additional funding for substance use and mental health disorder services
  - Interactions and engagements with those who are affected by substance use and mental health disorders
Eliminating Stigma through Storytelling
Evidence Based Interventions

• Through Contact
  • Peer storytelling
  • Role modeling

• Through Education
  • Science of addiction & recovery
  • To peers, families, stakeholders & the community

• Through Language
  • Use non-stigmatizing & recovery-oriented language
  • Hold each other accountable with teachable moments

(for more information, see: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK384914/)
When to Use Recovery Messaging

• When speaking to
  • Family
  • Friends
  • Neighbors
  • General public

• When writing
  • Articles
  • Newsletters
  • Blogging

• During media interview
How to Use Recovery Messaging

• Make it personal
  • Adds credibility
  • Breaks down negative perceptions

• Speak with one voice
  • Personal stories
  • Consistent messaging
  • Maximum impact

• Focus on recovery
  • Not the disorder
Components of Messaging Introductions

- Identify yourself
- Your relationship to recovery
  - Self, family, ally
- What recovery means to you
- Why you are sharing your recovery
Operationalizing Recovery

- Abstinence is not a valid measure
- Length of time is not an adequate descriptor
- Recovery is not linear
- Exclusive affiliation with a type of recovery is not an accurate reflection of the varieties of recovery experience
- Discerning between remission and recovery
- GAF, BARC-10, ARC – widely recognized
- Drug user health is an overlooked variable
Language Matters

Positive:
- Person with a Substance Use Disorder
- Alcohol and Drug Use
- Recurrence of Use
- Death by Suicide
- Person in Recovery
- Person with a Mental Health Disorder

Negative:
- Addict or Alcoholic
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse
- Relapse
- Committed Suicide
- Clean/Sober
- Crazy

Conducting A Language Audit
Perform Language Audit

• Perform a “language audit” of existing materials for language that may be stigmatizing, then replace with more inclusive language

• Review internal and external documents

• Use existing resources for language assistance
Content to Audit

Internal
• Policies
• Procedures
• Training Manuals
• Emails

External
• PowerPoints
• worksheets
• brochures
• Forms
• Blogs
• website
• Mission/Vision
Audit Reflections

- First-person language?
  - Person with SUD vs addict

- Language with clear, easily understood meanings?
  - Negative urine drug screen vs. clean UDS

- Fear-based words?
  - Unlike anything we’ve seen before
What else can be done?

• Reflect on the types of information you want to disseminate at work

• When developing new materials – seek input from stakeholders

• Train staff on stigma – especially negative impacts related to stigma
info@facesandvoicesofrecovery.org
facesandvoicesofrecovery.org
10 G Street, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20002
Post Event Reminders

• You will receive the slides and any materials within one week.

• Continuing Education links will be included.

• We value your feedback! Please share your thoughts on the Participant Feedback Evaluation.

For training information: Cindy Christy, Sr. Program Manager, christyc@umkc.edu
For general information: Callan Howton, Director, howtonc@umkc.edu
# Upcoming Trainings!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Focus</th>
<th>Date(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethics, Values &amp; Boundaries in Peer Recovery Support Work</td>
<td>January 12\textsuperscript{th} &amp; February 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Impact of Compassion Fatigue in Peer Support Work</td>
<td>January 26\textsuperscript{th} &amp; February 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2021</td>
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For training information: Cindy Christy, Sr. Program Manager, christyc@umkc.edu
For general information: Callan Howton, Director, howtonc@umkc.edu
Thank You
Resources

Advocacy with Anonymity brochure
• https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/blog/publication/advocacy-with-anonymity/

Language
• https://www.recoveryanswers.org/addiction-ary/
• http://www.changingthenarrative.news/

Your Choices, Our Lives: A Quick Guide to Fair and Accurate Media Coverage of Addiction and Mental Illness
References


References


