

EDUCATION ON ADDICTION MEDICINE IN THE BASIC HEALTH CARE TRAINING: THE EXPERIENCE OF SWITZERLAND

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Background:

The use of substances can create medical consequences and is frequently the reason for medical visits, hospital admissions and hospitalization. The feedback from people who use drugs (PWUD) and caregivers is unfortunately unsatisfactory. Caregivers report difficulties in managing addiction in primary care settings, while patients often feel their needs are not appropriately recognized and are treated inadequately. On the other hand, there is evidence that medical care can be effective if delivered by suitably trained caregivers. Unfortunately, basic health education for medical doctors, nurses and other caregivers usually does not include a training on addiction.

Description of model of care/intervention:

Both the training program offered in the bachelor's degree and the secondary education in nursing care at the Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana (SUPSI) were evaluated. Theoretical contents on addiction are part of the program, but no focus on the management of outpatients and inpatients was developed. It was therefore decided to include more specific contents on the practical care of addiction, on the management of treatment barriers, on the medical consequence of drug and alcohol use, as hepatitis C and liver disease.

Effectiveness:

After receiving specific education on addiction, nursing students and caregivers reported to be more confident in treating patients who were active drug users and to be able to plan appropriate treatment programs, with the aim of ameliorating care, reducing stigma and marginalization and reducing the discomfort to health staff.

Conclusion and next steps:

To ensure optimal care for patients who use substances and patients who are actively injecting drugs, it is important to work on basic health education and not just on specialized health staff. On the same basis, it would be worth considering introducing specific contents about the management of addiction in the educational programs of medical doctors.

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