



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

INSTITUTE OF BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Research and News Worth Repeating

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Substance Use

Younger Age at First Drug Use Tied to Faster Transition to Substance Use Disorder

Physician's Weekly – April 27, 2021

According to a research letter published by JAMA Pediatrics, younger age at drug initiation is associated with a faster transition to substance use disorder (SUD). Nora D. Volkow, M.D., from the U.S. National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and colleagues used data from the National Surveys on Drug Use and Health from 2015 to 2018 to estimate the prevalence of specific SUDs since first drug use for 12-17 year-olds and 18-25 year-olds for the following substances: tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin or prescription misuse including opioids, stimulants, and tranquilizers. The researchers found that past-year cannabis use disorder was higher for adolescents than for young adults at all examined time frames since first use of the drug.

<https://www.physiciansweekly.com/younger-age-at-first-drug-use-tied-to-faster-transition-to-substance-use-disorder/>

School of Medicine, Quality Insights Develop Program to Address Addiction Stigma

Marshall University News – April 19, 2021

Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine and the Charleston-based non-profit Quality Insights have developed a new e-learning system aimed to help healthcare workers reduce substance use disorder (SUD) stigma experienced by patients in hospital settings. SUD stigma can negatively impact the quality of clinical care received by people with SUD. This new e-learning system is meant to help reduce bias among healthcare professionals in part by improving the language they use to communicate about SUD and with patients living with SUD. These online tools are tailored to the unique experiences of healthcare workers and promote language like 'a person with substance use disorder' rather than 'addict' or 'infants exposed to substances before birth' versus 'drug baby.' These tools are also meant to help reduce compassion fatigue among healthcare providers. Healthcare professionals at St. Mary's Medical Center and Cabell Huntington Hospital will pilot this new e-learning system hospital-wide, including Project Engage which unifies policies and protocols to increase likelihood that patients with SUD will be prepared for and choose long-term treatment upon discharge.

<https://www.marshall.edu/news/2021/04/19/marshall-school-of-medicine-quality-insights-develop-program-to-address-addiction-stigma/>

As Opioid Deaths Surge, Biden Team Moves to Make Buprenorphine Treatment Mainstream

NPR – April 27, 2021

New federal guidelines released by the Biden Administration will allow far more medical practitioners to prescribe buprenorphine, a drug proven to reduce opioid relapses and overdose deaths. The change lowers regulatory hurdles that critics believe sharply limit use of the life-saving medication at a time when drug deaths are surging. The new rules eliminate a training requirement and allow a wider range of health workers to offer buprenorphine treatment, including nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and certified nurse midwives. This move comes at a dire moment in the nation's opioid epidemic. Experts say the spread of illicit fentanyl combined with disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a devastating rise in fatal overdoses. Although these new guidelines allow more practitioners to prescribe the medication, healthcare workers will still need additional training and federal waivers if they plan to treat more than 30 patients with the medication.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/27/990997759/as-opioid-deaths-surge-biden-team-moves-to-make-buprenorphine-treatment-mainstre>

Local camp helping children impacted by a family member's substance abuse

WSBT22 – May 11, 2021

There has been a focus on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted adults with substance use disorder (SUD). Camp Mariposa helps children ages 9 through 12 impacted by relatives with SUD. Camp is held four to six times a year from Friday to Sunday. The camps provide an opportunity for kids to be kids. They do fun, traditional camping activities like crafts, activities and games but also talk about serious topics like addiction and depression. There are other gatherings and social activities offered over the course of the year and campers and mentors make a one-year commitment to the program. About 40% of campers are in foster care. All camps and activities are free for the families who participate. Since the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, Camp Mariposa had been doing virtual camps but is now beginning to plan in-person weekend camps. There are more than 15 camps across the country.

<https://wsbt.com/addicted-america/local-camp-helping-children-impacted-by-a-family-members-substance-abuse>

Grants expand postnatal care to substance-exposed newborns

MassLive – May 10, 2021

Massachusetts has been among states to enact legislation and fund pilot programs to provide services to newborns exposed before birth to opioids and other substances and at risk for a form of withdrawal known as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). Mercy Medical Center, part of Trinity Health Of New England, is among five hospitals in the commonwealth to receive Health Policy Commission (HPC) grants totaling \$1.4 million to target what is done after discharge to keep these babies safe and healthy as well as their caregivers. HPC has had a Mother and Infant-Focused Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Investment Program since 2016. The current grants are from its newer Cost-Effective, Coordinated Care for Caregivers and Substance Exposed Newborns (C4SEN) Investment Program. Treatment for NAS may be therapeutic - keeping exposed babies in a darker, quieter environment and encouraging breastfeeding and bonding with mothers - and may also involve an opioid like morphine for a time, depending on an infant's assessment score for withdrawal signs like vomiting and poor feeding. Maternal opioid-substitution programs are said to help pregnant women maintain prenatal care, and better manage their disorder than trying to withdraw from opioids and possibly exposing the fetus to repeated periods of withdrawal. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, buprenorphine and methadone are two drugs that are considered safe and effective treatments for opioid use disorder during pregnancy.

Telehealth

The American Board of Telehealth Offers New Certificate Focused on Virtual Mental Health

MobiHealthNews – April 26, 2021

The American Board of Telehealth (ABT) has opened registration for its new self-paced, online behavioral telehealth certification program. In response to growing behavioral health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ABT developed this curriculum to give mental health professionals the tools to effectively deliver behavioral health services through telehealth. The program consists of seven learning modules that range from introductory topics in telehealth to clinical applications and regulatory considerations. The content also includes material on unique topics such as child and elder care and cultural competency. It was designed to be applicable for a range of healthcare professionals, including psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, prevention specialists and more, according to the announcement. Registration costs \$395 for individuals and \$195 for students, with discounts available for team training.

<https://www.mobihealthnews.com/news/american-board-telehealth-offers-new-certificate-focused-virtual-mental-health>

Telehealth's Awkward Waiting Room Problem, and How One Company Aims to Solve It

HealthcareIT News – April 23, 2021

Although telehealth has made many aspects of healthcare more seamless, a few elements remain challenging. Among them is the “waiting room”. This week a new survey from LifeLink Systems found that the vast majority of patients said they'd prefer a “virtual” waiting room that would allow them to complete paperwork on their phones before arriving at the doctors' office. Just as with in-person visits, providers run behind, regardless of how much preparation the patient has done ahead of time. However, with a virtual waiting room's blank screen, a patient may question whether instructions were correctly followed and be tempted to click away or “leave” altogether. In response to this challenge, Mend, a Florida-based telemedicine platform, released an "enhanced virtual waiting room" that keeps patients engaged via a series of "Netflix-like" videos from a library of specialty-specific content for patients. The selection stems from publicly available information: the doctor's national provider identification, their specialty and their location. This platform works across several browsers including Chrome, Edge, Firefox and Safari.

<https://www.healthcareitnews.com/news/telehealths-awkward-waiting-room-problem-and-how-one-company-aims-solve-it>

Mental Health

Social Workers and EMS to Respond to Mental Health Emergencies NYC-wide

New York Post – April 26, 2021

New York City Mayor, Bill de Blasio announced Monday that the city has decided to expand a pilot program that sends social workers and EMS staff to non-violent mental health emergencies instead of cops citywide to all precincts. The test run for the program was initially set to begin in February for the 25th, 28th, and 32nd precincts only. However, de Blasio said he is convinced the approach will work city-wide. City Hall will be investing \$112 million to the program — the largest new mental health expenditure in the whopping \$98.6 billion spending plan for Fiscal Year 2022 — so New Yorkers in the throes of a mental health crisis can be connected with services instead of solely with the police. So far, there are no known specifics for the program, including a name for the initiative, slated to begin shortly following pilot training on May 3rd.

<https://nypost.com/2021/04/26/nyc-social-workers-and-ems-to-take-mental-health-emergencies/>

CVS Trial Would Provide Access to Mental Health Services

NPR – April 27, 2021

Drug store chain CVS is piloting a program that would bring mental health counseling into 12 retail stores. The goal is to improve access to care and reduce medical costs associated with poor mental health. Therapists will be available at the store to serve walk-in patrons in need of help. In addition, virtual services will also be provided. The pharmacy and a nurse practitioner will also be available in close proximity to these therapists, making referrals even more convenient. Through this program, CVS plans to staff at least 34 stores with therapists this year.

<https://www.npr.org/2021/04/27/991117927/cvs-trial-would-provide-access-to-mental-health-services>

COVID-19 Pandemic

Colorado Tested More Prisoners for COVID-19 Than Most States — but It's Not Clear if That Prevented Deaths

The Denver Post – April 15, 2021

Colorado ranked near the top of all states for testing its prison inmates for COVID-19. However, it's not clear whether that helped reduce the number of COVID deaths behind bars. A study from the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice found that people incarcerated in state prisons were more likely to die of COVID-19 than free people in all but four states: Vermont, New York, Arizona and Rhode Island. States that did more testing tended to have smaller gaps, though. Colorado ranked fifth in tests performed compared to the state's prison population. It was 24th, however, on the number of deaths among prisoners compared to deaths in the general population. The Colorado Department of Corrections and an expert in prison health questioned the way the study compared deaths. According to Kevin Schnepel, an associate professor of economics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver who analyzed the data, the study can't prove that increased testing was causally related to lower death rates, primarily due to differences in how states effectively quarantined new prisoners and encouraged or enforced mask-wearing and social distancing.

<https://www.denverpost.com/2021/04/15/colorado-covid-testing-prison-deaths/>