Harm Reduction 101
Understanding Harm Reduction in Nursing Practice

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Goal:
Increase nurses’ understanding of harm reduction approaches within the context of substance use.

Objectives:
1) Clearly articulate the role of harm reduction within the context of substance use.
2) Clearly articulate nurses’ role in harm reduction.
3) List at least 2 harm reduction practices related to substance use.
4) List at least 2 harm reduction myths and challenge them with evidence-informed research.
5) Identify key principles when working under a harm reduction model as nurses.
What is Harm Reduction?

- Harm reduction is the umbrella term for programs, policies and practices that aim to reduce the negative consequences associated with behaviours that are typically considered high risk.
- Focused on increasing safety and minimizing injury, disease and death related to high risk behaviours such as substance use.
Harm Reduction Principles

- Pragmatism
- Focus on Harms
- Emphasis on Human Rights
- Maximizing Options
- Active Participation
Why is it so Controversial?

“The concept of harm reduction is often made into an unnecessarily controversial issue as if there were a contradiction between (i) prevention and treatment on one hand and (ii) reducing the adverse health and social consequences of drug use on the other hand. This is a false dichotomy. These policies are complementary.”

(UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 2008, p.1).
Fact v. Myth

Harm Reduction

“Enables and Promotes Drug Use”
“Anti-Abstinence”

“Increases Public Disorder”

“Not Effective”

“Drains Resources from Treatment Services”

“Increases Crime”
1989
First Needle Exchange Program in B.C.

1997
Public Health Emergency declared in Vancouver

2001
Vancouver adopts Four Pillar Drug Strategy

2001

2002

2003
Insite opens

2008

2011
SCC unanimously rules to uphold Insite’s exemption from CDSA

2012

2011

2012

Early 2016
• Early January-Dr. Peter Centre granted Sec 56 Exemption, and extension for Insite.

Early 2016

Mid 2016-Present
• April -Public Health Emergency announced

2008
• Needle distribution replaces needle exchange in B.C.
• Dr. Peter Centre provides supervised injection

2012
• Provincial Take Home Naloxone Program developed
• Towards the Heart Website launched (BCCDC)
Needle Distribution and Recovery Programs

- **Goals**: To decrease the spread of blood-borne pathogens (i.e.: HIV, Hepatitis B and C) by providing sterile injection equipment, and recovering used equipment, increasing access to treatment and supports, providing education and information.

Supervised Consumption Sites (SCS)

- **Goals**: Prevent transmission of communicable diseases, increase access to detox, treatment, health and social services, education around drug use.
Outreach Strategies

- **Goals:** Reach individuals who are using substances and are hard to reach
- Range from education around safer use and clean injecting material, education around where to access testing, treatment, or other health and social services.

Overdose Prevention Strategies

- **Goals:** To prevent overdoses by providing education on how to assess overdoses, provide access to opioid antidotes, and education on how to administer these antidotes.
Drug Replacement and Maintenance Therapy

- **Goals:** To relieve withdrawal symptoms during detoxification, help individuals with opiate addiction to remain in treatment, reduce criminal activity, increase access to health and social supports.

Housing First

**Goals:** To promote recovery among individuals with mental health and addiction challenges who experience chronic homelessness, by providing housing without requiring psychiatric treatment or sobriety.
Harm Reduction and Nursing Practice

• Nurses play a significant role in harm reduction, and can positively or negatively impact patients’ experiences

• Consistent with the Canadian Nurses Association *Code of Ethics*

• Aligns with the College of Registered Nurses of B.C.’s professional standards of practice
Complexities of Substance Use

- Recognize the various factors that contribute to substance use
- Shifts focus away from substance itself to the skills and health behaviours of individuals working towards managing their lives
- Promote health action, build capacity, focus on opportunity

“If the frogs in a pond started behaving strangely, our first reaction would not be to punish them or even to treat them. Instinctively, we would wonder what has happened to the pond” (heretohelp, 2013).
Principles for Nurses Practicing Harm Reduction

**Build Trusting Relationships**
Build rapport and trust, celebrate incremental changes, look for teachable moments and build capacity.

**Non-Judgemental Care**
Recognize individuals’ rights and choices and meet clients where they are. Disapproval and judgement threatens nurse-client relationship.

**Cultural Safety**
Be aware of your own cultural views, assumptions and biases in order to communicate, understand, and provide care to clients that is respectful of their cultural values and beliefs.

**Empowerment**
Empower clients and allow them to become active participants in their care. Act as facilitators in guiding clients to make decisions, rather than making decisions for them.
Strength-Based Approach
Identify clients’ existing knowledge, capacity and skills. Nurses should work with clients to identify and develop their resiliency and coping skills.

Trauma-Informed Practice
Recognize the importance of responding to an individual’s intersecting experiences of trauma, mental health and substance use concerns (Trauma Informed Practice Team, 2013).

Consider Root Causes to Substance Use
Recognize the various socio-ecological factors that contribute to substance use and avoid victim blaming.

Self-Reflection
Be aware of your own perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and misconceptions, and differentiate your personal and professional ethical values.
“I don’t want you to save me, I want you to stand by my side while I save myself.”
Other Resources


- Videos:
  - Fraser Health: Moments to Milestones: Engaging with people who use substances: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX1RTsor148
  - Understanding Addiction (Dr. Gabor Mate)- Three minute video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5sOh4gKPlg
Thank you!

Questions and Comments ?
Get Involved!

- Keep an eye on the ARNBC website at [www.arnbc.ca](http://www.arnbc.ca) for announcements of events and discussions in your area.
- Join the interactive discussion on the ARNBC blog at [www.arnbc.ca/blog](http://www.arnbc.ca/blog).
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References


