Highlights from HAMAC

July 12, 2022

Summer Educational Workshop
Addressing Stigma in Medicine
"I am a life worth saving."

Vancouver CoastalHealth

HAMAC hosted its first of two educational workshops this year. The workshop was to help medical leaders understand stigma to enable them to improve the system of care. The workshop allowed space for dialogue on social and structural stigma with a focus on mental health and substance use. Attendees were given time to reflect on what they had learned and to write down their personal commitments to help disrupt stigma and create change.

As healthcare providers, we know that despite our best efforts, developing, delivering and championing equitable health services for all patients and clients is not always achieved. For some, persistent health inequities are continually experienced and prevent at-risk groups from seeking and receiving the care they need. This is often a result of unconscious bias and stigma.

Stigma in medicine affects everyone. Those most affected are people suffering from health conditions such as mental illness and substance use. All care providers need to address stigma through continued education and reflection on one's own personal biases to improve physical and mental health outcomes for patients.

In partnership with our mental health and substance use colleagues, medical leaders explored stigma through hearing from patients with lived experience and dialogue. Reflection on their own thoughts and feelings around stigma was followed by their commitments to help address this issue on a personal and systems level.

"What words come to mind when you hear stories from patients with lived experience of stigma when seeking healthcare?"
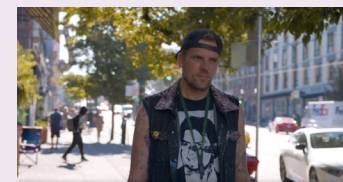

What actions can medical leaders take to disrupt stigma and create change for patients?

- Organize and attend educational opportunities to help identify unconscious biases.
- Provide teachings on trauma-informed and culturally-safe care.
- Address systemic barriers that hinder groups from widely-accessible care (e.g. provide training for mental health and substance use care in acute settings, organize longitudinal care for people with substance use disorders).
- Establish trust with patients through respectful interactions, active listening and meaningful dialogue.
- Practice holistic care for patients, treating all health concerns as equally important.
- Reflect on one's own personal biases and continuously "self-check" to remain mindful of assumptions about those suffering from mental health or substance use disorders.

Resources
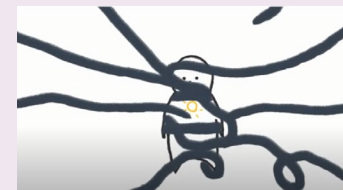
UNITE project

Resisting stigma