ABSTRACT

Harm reduction (HR) is a therapy used in addiction that respects a patient autonomy, while minimizing the associated risks of a harmful behavior. While implemented in both Canada and various European countries, HR is largely unknown in the United States; this literature review explores HR integration into American nursing practice.

Target Audience:
Due to the rising incidence of overdose deaths and increasing population of persons with addiction, the target audience should be all practicing clinical nurses and nurse educators.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
1. The learner will be able to define the components of harm reduction.
2. The learner will be able to identify the ethical principles underlying harm reduction.
3. The learner will be able to determine where & how to apply harm reduction in one’s personal practice.

Background
Harm reduction is a concept best described as the recognition that individuals will engage in unhealthy behaviors, and the goal is to minimize the associated potential harm. It has been used as an alternative model of care to treat those with addictions and minimize the spread of HIV & Hepatitis. Substance abuse and overdose deaths are increasing at profound rates in the United States. Nurses and clinicians must evaluate their response to this growing epidemic. Healthcare practitioners, and nurses in particular, are positioned to encounter situations in which harm reduction strategies may be appropriate.

METHODS
Design: Integrated Literature Review
Databases: CINHAL & PubMed
Keywords: harm reduction; addiction; nurse

Of the 99 articles retrieved, 10 were analyzed in the integrative literature review. The remaining 89 articles were excluded due to the following parameters: duplicate article, application of harm reduction to alternate health disparities (tall prevention, smoking cessation, or cardiovascular disease), no clear relationship to nursing practice, or a position piece.

RESULTS

DISCUSSION

Studies which included successful use of harm reduction strategies reported positive outcomes with respect to patient self-esteem, self-advocacy, and ability to navigate support services. Patients reported decrease in both money and problems associated with drug and alcohol use. Several studies found close similarities between tenants of harm reduction and nursing code of ethics. Therefore, nurses in the U.S. could apply tenants of harm reduction strategies across the continuum of care from interactions with individual clients to advocating for policy changes.

How to Put into Nursing Practice

REFERENCES


