Reducing Healthcare Stigma in Substance Use Disorder

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of this literature review is to determine how stigma not only affects the healthcare of substance use disorder patients, but how we can improve the outcome of these patients.

Methods: Literature review of articles based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria from UF OneSearch, Ohio Link, JAAPA, and research advisor.

Results: The studies showed a connection in decreased access and quality of care for substance use disorder patients based on a preexisting stigma amongst a wide variety of healthcare providers and students. The articles also discussed an educational and societal approach to reducing this stigma. In many cases, despite education, the stigma would persist.

Conclusion: Before we can provide education, we must acknowledge that stigma first exists. Providing better education to the general public and healthcare providers can help decrease the stigma that surrounds patients with substance use disorder to allow them to obtain the care they need.

INTRODUCTION

Substance use disorder is dependence or overindulgence on an addictive substance, especially alcohol or drugs. It is a problem that has been plaguing the United States. In 2016 there were approximately 115 deaths daily in the US. With this epidemic comes a stigma towards those individuals with substance use disorders. Stigma is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. It effects how people interact with others and can lead to judgement upon others. When providers bring stigma into the exam room, it can affect how they approach the care of their patients. The aim of this literature review is to determine how stigma not only affects the care of substance use disorder patients, but how we can improve the outcome of these patients.

METHODS

A review of journals and articles related to the topic were gathered. UF OneSearch, Ohio Link and JAAPA were the three sources used. The key terms and phrases “substance abuse stigma”, “substance abuse disorder”, “provider stigma”, and “provider stigma substance abuse” were utilized to narrow the search. Inclusion criteria criterion of publication after the year 200 was used to ensure the literature was current. Articles had to be in full text and written in English. From this search, a total of 10 articles and studies were gathered to provide statistical data as well as supporting literature for this analysis.

RESULTS

The articles of literature reviewed identified key aspects of stigma and the impact stigma has on the access of care, the quality of care, and the quality of life of patients with substance use disorder. Terminology used shows statistical data that favors the use of more “positive” terms versus terms such as abuse, addict, and relapse. Educating students and providers about substance use disorder also showed statistical variance in the decline of perceived stigma when compared to those without the extra curriculum. Despite many efforts to reduce stigma, substance use disorder patients still perceive stigma throughout every aspect of treatment which can make them less likely to be compliant and willing to continue with treatment.

DISCUSSION

This literature review displayed how stigma affects the patient provider relationship, as well as the treatment and care that patient receives. Stigma is something that involved in every aspect of life, especially for someone dealing with substance use disorder. Providers jobs are to treat patients’ diseases and disorders with the education that they receive. Stigma can and will affect the way a patient seeks treatment and ultimately can impact the outcome of this treatment. Education amongst providers and students was shown in several articles to help with the stigma. This education also needs to include knowledge of the stigma that they hold for substance use disorder patients and how they can reduce it to give the best possible care to their patients and help educate the general population. This education can span from general understanding of the term stigma and what it means to those patients as well as understanding more appropriate terminology to use to help ward off this stigma. By combining the understanding and education of substance use stigma, providers can and will help with the reduction of this stigma and lead to better treatment and quality of life for substance use disorder patients.

CONCLUSION

REFERENCES