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Barriers to Substance Abuse Treatment For Nurses

by

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Abstract

One of the major public health concerns in the United States is prescription medication abuse & alcoholism. Nurses and other health professionals with substance use disorders are part of this concern. The primary purpose of this study is to address the current epidemic of drug misuse and abuse, including prescription drug abuse among the nursing population. It is to bring attention to how substance use disorders within the nursing profession endanger the public. Data was synthesized from existing literature to explain why prevalence of nurses that participate in treatment in general is lower than the prevalence of the general public's participation in treatment. Recommendations and methods are presented in the research that can be used to increase awareness in nursing education programs and within the nursing profession to remove obstacles to treatment. This could significantly impact the number of student nurses and licensed nurses entering treatment early in their nursing careers; thereby, providing greater public protection.

Aim

The aim of this meta-analysis study is to address the current epidemic of drug misuse and abuse, including prescription drug abuse among the nursing population. It will bring attention to how substance use disorders, that occur in the nursing profession, affect the profession and endanger the public. This study will explain why the prevalence for substance abuse treatment for nurses is less than it is for the general public and identify the barriers that exist that prevent nurses from entering into treatment.

Problem or Issue

Nurses comprise one of the largest segments of the U.S. workforce and are the nation's largest healthcare profession (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). They have consistently been rated as the most trusted profession in society and are steadily thought of as understanding and caring (Horton-Deutsch, McNelis, & O'Haver Day, 2011). However, studies reveal that substance abuse and addiction are serious concerns within the nursing profession. These studies indicate that anywhere from 10 to 20% percentage of nurses are impacted by substance abuse. This is approximately the same, or higher than the general public (National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN], 2011). Substance abuse by nurses can have a significant negative impact on patient care. This is especially disconcerting since there are an estimated 3.1 million RNs nationwide and 2.6 million or 84.8% of these RNs. employed in nursing. The impact on nursing using this estimated rate indicates approximately 310,000 to 620,000 nurses within the United

States may be affected by substance use disorders. Despite these concerns within the nursing profession, there are several barriers to substance abuse treatment for nurses.

Discussion

The use of illegal substances, the misuse of prescription medications along with alcoholism are major public health concerns. Prescription drug overdoses claim more lives than heroin and cocaine combined (CDC, 2011). Nurses are at risk for developing problems with prescription abuse and addiction for many reasons. These risk factors include family history, work stress, lack of education, and easy access. Research has indicated that treatment does work to address these risks. Treatment is greatly effective when it matches the needs of the individual and is followed with therapeutic support systems. Additionally, according to Monroe, Kenaga, Dietrich, Carter, and Cowan (2013), the nurse population has been identified as receiving less addiction treatment than the general population. There exist several barriers to treatment for nurses. These barriers include lack of resources, public perception, stigma associated with addiction, workplace neglect, lack of education, and inappropriate coping mechanisms (NCSBN, 2011). This study identifies several factors surrounding nurses and substance abuse and recommends areas of prevention and treatment for nurses with substance use disorders.

Research Purpose and Significance

This is a meta-analysis study that seeks to illuminate the substance abuse and prescription drug epidemic that occurs within society and within the nursing profession. It identifies the risk factors for those nurses who are prone to engage in substance abuse activities and identifies the barriers to treatment that exist against nurses who have substance use disorders. It will add to the body of knowledge related to nursing and substance abuse. This research can be the foundation for future studies related to prevention and treatment of addiction in nurses.

Conclusion

Substance abuse is a major concern in society and within the nursing profession. Nurses are susceptible to substance abuse for many reasons. The purpose of this research study was to synthesize data that would identify and address the current epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse, including prescription drug abuse, within the nursing profession. The study identifies risk factors that exist for nurses entering the profession and the barriers to treatment that occurs within society and the healthcare system against nurses with substance abuse issues.

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Author Biography

Dr. Carol Stanford has recently graduated with her EdD from Drexel University. Her concentration is in higher education and her research focuses on registered nurses and addiction. She holds a Master's in Public Health from Drexel University. She was the specialist or program manager of California's comprehensive substance abuse and mental health monitoring program for nurses for over 14 years. She was involved with disciplining nurses for substance abuse and unprofessional conduct for 8 years prior. She was a part of the Substance Abuse Committee that wrote the Substance Use Disorder in Nursing manual for National Council State Boards of Nursing and has instructed nurse educators and administrators throughout her career about substance use disorders and mental illness in registered nurses.