The Power of Language; the Power of Allies

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Disclosure

No commercial relationships to disclose
Today’s Concepts

Social Cognition

Old & New Ideology

The Message
Implicit Bias

Subtle cognitive process that influences decision making below the conscious level
'stigma/noun:

a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

• Reduces a person to nothing more than their difficulties [stigma]
• Leads systems to withhold appropriate services [discrimination]
• Robs people of possible life opportunities
• Exposes people to preventable traumatic experiences

How have you or someone you know been stigmatized?
“Words have immense power to wound or heal...The right words catalyze personal transformation and offer invitations to citizenship and community service. The wrong words stigmatize and dis-empower.”

-William White
Author and Recovery Advocate

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An emotional and imaginative association surrounding a word; a meaning given to a word through its use in a society or culture

Connotation = Meaning!
What is Our Message?

‘Addict/Alcoholic’
‘Substance Abuse’
‘Relapse’
‘Drug Replacement Therapy’

What do you hear when these words are used?

What ideas and connotations do they carry?
• 500 doctoral-level clinicians exposed to a vignette:
  • man used drugs/alcohol for past few years
  • Court-mandated to treatment
  • program required abstinence
  • had complied with treatment program requirements
  • After 30 days was found with 2 positive urinalyses
  • now awaits his “appointment” with the judge

• “Substance abuser”
  • clinicians more likely to deny treatment
  • clinicians significantly more likely to judge person as deserving of blame and punishment
    ➢ this effect is even stronger in the general public

• ”Person with substance use disorder”
  • receive better treatment and more compassionate care
"Insanity is doing the same thing over & over again & expecting different results."

-Albert Einstein
• Despite increased agreement that alcohol addiction is biomedical, more viewed it also as due to “bad character”

• Thus, while emphasizing biomedical, need to talk about addiction as treatable disorder, recovery is likely…
You have called a friend and their answering machine picks up...

YOU HAVE 30 SECONDS: WHAT DO YOU WANT PEOPLE TO KNOW AND REMEMBER?!

Ideas can redefine, reconnect and revitalize
• **Substance Use Disorder**
  • **DSM-5, 2013**
    • Occur when the recurrent use of alcohol and/or drugs causes clinically and functionally significant impairment, such as health problems, disability, and failure to meet major responsibilities at work, school, or home
    • The diagnosis is based on evidence of impaired control, social impairment, risky use, and pharmacological criteria
    • Spectrum of symptoms from mild, moderate to severe
  
  www.samhsa.gov/disorders/substance-use
Exploration of Concepts

• **Recovery**
  • A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential: SAMHSA, 2012
    • **Health:** overcoming or managing one’s disease(s) or symptoms...and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional wellbeing.
    • **Home:** a stable and safe place to live.
    • **Purpose:** meaningful daily activities (e.g. job, school, volunteerism, etc.) and the independence, income and resources to participate in society.
    • **Community:** relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to Avoid</th>
<th>Why</th>
<th>Preferred Terminology</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addict, Abuser, Junkie, User</td>
<td>These terms are demeaning because they label a person solely by his/her illness or behavior and imply a permanency to the condition</td>
<td>Person in active addiction, or with a substance use disorder, or experiencing an alcohol or drug problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuse</td>
<td>This negates the fact that addictive disorders are a medical condition; it blames the illness solely on the individual, ignoring the environmental and genetic factors, as well as the ability of substances to alter brain chemistry; it absolves those selling and promoting addictive substances of wrong doing; and it feeds into the stigma experienced by the individual, the family, and treatment providers</td>
<td>Misuse, harmful use, hazardous use, problem use, risky use</td>
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<td>Clean or Dirty (for drug test results)</td>
<td>These words associate illness symptoms (i.e. positive drug tests) with filth</td>
<td>Negative, positive, substance-free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habit or Drug Habit</td>
<td>These terms deny the medical nature of the condition and imply that resolution of the problem is simply a matter of willpower in being able to stop the habitual behavior</td>
<td>Substance use disorder, alcohol or drug disorder, active addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement or substitution therapy</td>
<td>These words imply that treatment medications are equal to street drugs like heroin and suggests a lateral move from illegal addiction to legal addiction; this does not accurately characterize treatment</td>
<td>Treatment, medication-assisted treatment, medication</td>
</tr>
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Core Message

RECOVERY ORIENTED SYSTEMS OF CARE WORK

I AM A PERSON IN LONG-TERM RECOVERY
I AM A RECOVERY ALLY

- We can offer and *are providing our communities* a new hope and stability
- Working towards our goals, *we’ve been able to connect* with ourselves, our families, our peers and our community
- I’m speaking out so *others may have the opportunities* I and/or my loved ones had, and to break down misperceptions that shape public opinion (stigma)
- Being in recovery, a recovery ally, active in our community has *helped me find my voice*, and I can use it to help change public policy (discrimination)
Core Message for an Ally

• I work and interact with this group and young people, who is a part of our community, living in long term recovery
• Recovery has brought stability to our lives
• They are part of a community that helps empower and enhance our community experience
• Long-term recovery has given them and our community new purpose, creating a culture of support and assistance
• Our collaboration makes it possible for all to find an enhance overall quality of life, while pursuing personal goals and successes
Words/Concepts We Need to Elevate and Celebrate

• Recovery Friendly and Recovery Ready Communities

• People in/Seeking Long-Term Recovery

• Sustainability & Change

• Growth & Possibility

• Person First Language

• Recovery is Possible

• Be the Vocal Majority
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References
Ahern, J., Stuber, J., Sandro Galea, S. Stigma, discrimination and the health of illicit drug users. Drug Alcohol Depend. 2007 May;88(2-3):188-96