Project title: Safe use of cocaine, MDMA, & other illicit drugs

Host organization: The Umbrella Project

Name of school and course: Algonquin College – Nursing 3323 CHN Clinical Placement and DEN 4480 Oral Health Outreach I

Dates of placement: (September 13th – December 6th, 2016)

Team members: Steph Dupelle, Amanda Hohban, Kalen Smith, Fatima Bahia, Marisa Shaver and Aline Ha

Clinical preceptor/advisor: Amanda Neilson, Polly Leonard

Clinical professor: Carmen Hust

Purpose of the student project:

This project was to research harm reduction strategies based on safe use of cocaine, MDMA, and other illicit drugs for the Algonquin College student population. While working in affiliation with the Umbrella Project, resources were created, to provide harm reduction strategies for safer drug use for Algonquin College students.
Assessment:

The focus for this project was to find harm reduction strategies for individuals who use cocaine, MDMA and ecstasy. We worked with the Algonquin College Umbrella Project, a harm reduction program on campus. The focus population is Algonquin College students, who either live on campus or solely attend classes. We used the resource National College Health Assessment (NCHA) to help determine the use of MDMA, cocaine and ecstasy on campus. Based on the NCHA survey completed in 2016, it was shown that 12% of males and 8% of women have used MDMA and 9% of males and 6% of females have used cocaine within Canada. (American College Health Association, 2016). These statistics provided us with research that motivated us to implement harm reduction strategies for the population. Currently, at Algonquin College, there are no strategies in place specific to MDMA, ecstasy or cocaine use. While these numbers are relatively low, it demonstrates that students are still using and should be given the tools for safer use. During our environmental scan of Algonquin College, only two posters regarding harm reduction were found and they were not very visible. This shows there are few strategies in place to encourage students to use drugs safely. Working under the Umbrella Project, we created two pamphlets that provide students with harm reduction strategies while using MDMA, ecstasy and Cocaine. One pamphlet was specific for Cocaine use, while the other pamphlet focused on MDMA and ecstasy. By creating these pamphlets, we are helping promote a healthy campus environment where students are able to talk freely about harm reduction strategies.

Analysis:

Upon discussion with our preceptors, we discovered that there are some statistics of illicit drug use within student populations. The statistics found using NCHA broadly analyzed the student population within Canada. Unfortunately, there was no specific statistics based on drug use within Algonquin College available. However, we were able to interact with Algonquin students during our clinical experience. We ran an activity for students to test their harm reduction knowledge. We conducted a quick survey with students who passed by our table to let us know of at least one new thing they learned from our tabling. Based on the feedback students provided on the activity, they were unaware of many harm reduction strategies for drug use, and they also tended to overestimate the amount of drug use in this demographic. This feedback that we received proves that our statistic we retrieved from NCHA is valid and applicable to this specific demographic of Algonquin College students; students overestimated their knowledge of safe drug use techniques, as well as overestimated the use of drugs amongst their peers. As a result, secondary research was conducted and resources were created to create strategies for safe use of cocaine, MDMA, ecstasy and other illicit drugs.

Planning and/or Implementation:

We teamed up with the Umbrella Project in order to further examine and explore resources that could be provided to students on the safe use of MDMA and cocaine. The Umbrella Project identified some of their current resources available to students including pamphlets regarding Safer Tripping, Safer Drinking and Safer Cannabis Use and requested that we develop pamphlets regarding information on safe MDMA and cocaine use. We begin our project by conducting research through peer reviewed articles. This gave us the foundational information for this topic.
We further consulted other resources, specifically online sources that contained harm reduction strategies. We also as a group participated in a Harm Reduction information session with one of our preceptors, Amanda Neilson. This prompted our discussion as a group to further investigate helpful strategies Algonquin students can use. Having both Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Dental Hygiene students collaborating together promoted a wide range of knowledge and specialty to be applied to these pamphlets. This interprofessional collaboration experience allowed us to consider new approaches to care and increased our appreciation and understanding of other disciplines. We brainstormed strategies together, then followed the outline of the pamphlets already provided to create two new ones for MDMA/Ecstasy and cocaine use. We used a model to help organize our ideas on the pamphlets. The model we used is “Plan, Do, Study, Act”. We created a final rough draft of both pamphlets and sent them to our preceptors for feedback. We have received positive feedback about the layout and the strategies provided for safer use. At this point, the Umbrella Project will be finalizing both pamphlets and will be distributing them to students.

**Evaluation:**

A draft of the two pamphlets was submitted to the Preceptors, who gave positive constructive feedback regarding the information provided. They thought the harm reduction strategies were effective and presented appropriately for the target audience. At that point, edits to the pamphlets were done following their recommendations and submitted a final draft for approval. We believe our pamphlets will be beneficial to Algonquin College students and we are hopeful that it will implement safer drug use. Throughout the process of creating our harm reduction strategies, we have come to realize the importance of these safer use strategies. We as a group were surprised with the results of our findings from interacting with the population. This shows that our previous assumptions about drug use at Algonquin College were incorrect. From this, we felt that it was important to implement simple strategies that could be useful for safe use of drugs.

**Recommendations**

Team members who work within the Umbrella Project in the future could focus more on presentations and displays of awareness, as well as promoting the resources available to students and keeping them informed about safe ways to approach drug use. One recommendation is to have more harm reduction posters available around campus. Creating more posters will help increase harm reduction awareness within Algonquin College’s student population. We realized after interacting with the population, many students of Algonquin College are not aware of what harm reduction is and what its benefits are. Students should be informed of what harm reduction is, and be provided with techniques and strategies to safely use. For future Nursing and Dental Hygiene students who may work with the harm reduction team, a project that focuses on creating and providing ‘Safe Kits’ could be beneficial to the population who are using. These kits could include alcohol swabs, clean straws, packs of gum, water and contact information about harm reduction resources. Another project that could be worked on, is the ‘Trick Or Treat’ board that we had on display in Student Commons. This board included harm reduction facts about Marijuana and Alcohol use. A new board that includes MDMA, cocaine and ecstasy facts and harm reduction strategies could be developed.
References


Safer Cannabis Use (2012). Here To Help. *Center For Addictions Research of BC*. Vancouver, BC.


