



Stigma in Treating OUD during Pregnancy

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Moral failing vs brain disease

“Addiction is a chronic disease of the brain and it’s one that we have to treat the way we would any other chronic illness...”

- Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy

The Basics

- Chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite adverse consequences.
- Brain Disorder that involves functional changes to brain circuits involved in reward, stress and self-control.



What is Stigma?

Stigma: Levels

Systemic/structural

- Laws regulating access such as requirement for methadone clinics
- Policies that criminalize drug use
- Barriers to insurance coverage of treatment

Interpersonal / Societal

- Stigma by providers and their staff
- Family and community toward individuals with OUD

Self

- Internalization of stigmatizing beliefs held by others
 - Shame, guilt, fear

Stigma: Types

Stereotypes (Labels)

- Harmful and disrespectful beliefs about a group
- Common part of the human experience and not harmful in and of themselves
- Ex: dangerous, self-destructive, no job potential, bad parent

Prejudice (Thoughts)

- Belief and application of a stereotype leads to an emotional response
- Ex: the “isms”

Discrimination (Actions)

- When prejudice leads to behavior that excludes and devalues individuals
- Ex: hostility, refusal, blame, isolation, victimization, criminalization

Biases (we all have them)

Implicit

- Hidden
- Sneaky

vs.

Explicit

- Loud
- Active intent

"If you have a child that's addicted to drugs because you are! That should be a automatic felony they need put in jail"

- Ashley Falconer

"What the hell is wrong with people. They need to setilize these women so they don't cause any 8njury to any little child. Right away they should lose their babies. No ands, if, or buts!"

- Maryam Dawn Fleming

"These drug addict females should be spayed!!"

- Avery Maliikapu

"If the moms continue to take drugs while carrying a baby soon as she as given birth take the child off her and remover her insides so she can't hurt another baby"

- Bee Smith

Harmful Effects

- Isolation
- Disengagement with care
- Increased rate of maternal mortality
- Lower self-esteem
- Increased depression & anxiety
- Increased risk of overdose
- Fear of judgement
- Lack of disclosure
- Decreased funding
- Criminalization
- Lack of institutional support
- Removal of children
- Increased stress



How do we make a
difference?

System

- Government Policies
 - Increase access to housing, food, childcare, transportation, insurance, reproductive rights & services
- Criminal Justice Sector
 - Expunging drug-related felonies
 - Decriminalization of drug use
- Health Care Entities
- Research Institutions
- Child Protection Services

Medical

- Decrease silos of care
- Integrating care
 - Increase knowledge, comfort and empathy
 - Increase detection of SUD & MI
 - Perinatal Access Programs
 - Collaborative Care Programs
- Equity and inclusivity

Personal

- Know your biases
- Know the facts
- Language
 - Person-first
- Harm reduction
- Normalize
- Advocate
 - Speak up
- Educate

Language

Positive

- Person in Recovery
- Substance Use Disorder
- Drug use/Misuse
- Active use/Actively using
- Set Back
- Positive/Negative Drug Screen
- Declined Services
- Baby who is exposed/dependent


vs.

Negative

- Addict/Alcoholic
- Drug problem/habit
- Drug Abuse
- Drinking/Using/Shooting up
- Relapse/Fell off
- Clean/Dirty
- Refused/Non-compliant
- Addicted baby

Positive Effects

- Support systems
- Engagement with care
- Decreased maternal and fetal deaths
- Better birth outcomes
- Lower rates of custody loss
- Decreases “us” vs “them”
- Humanizing
- Dispels myths
- Increased trust
- Sustained recovery



“Coming together is a beginning,
staying together is progress,
& working together is success.”
- Henry Ford

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