

# Harm Reduction in Primary Care

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# Disclosures

- I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

# Objectives

- Describe the application of harm reduction principles in healthcare settings.
- Identify promising practices for the deployment of harm reduction strategies in primary care.

# Harm Reduction Basics



- **Harm Reduction:**
  - **Includes practical strategies** to reduce negative consequences of substance use and sexual risk
  - **Education focuses on health** safety skills, stigma reduction, short and long term goals
  - **Respects and encourages positive change**, which happens when people feel safe and supported
  - **Meets people 'where they're at' ... *but doesn't leave them there***

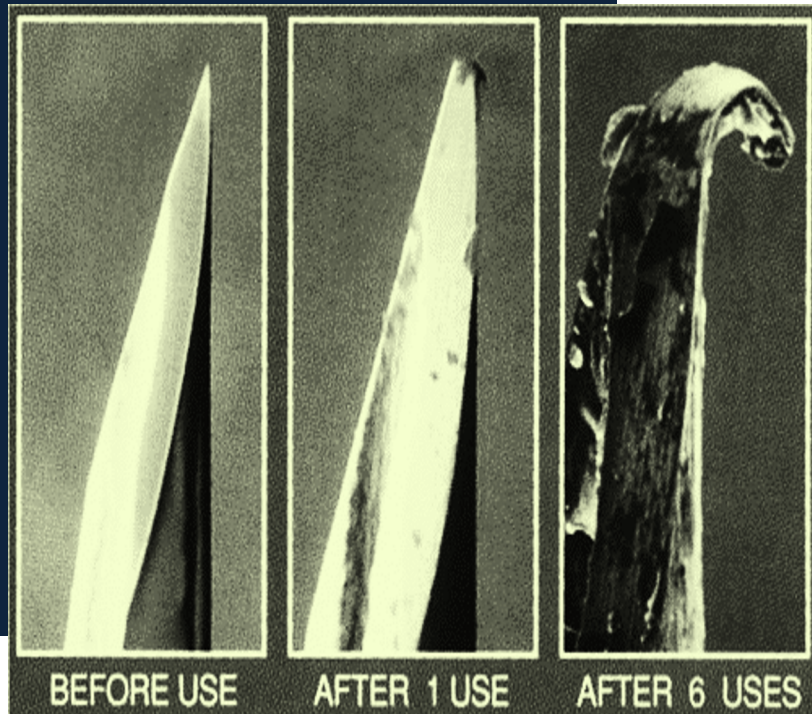
# Applying Principles in Primary Care

- **Use words in thoughtful ways**
  - Research shows language and labels can negatively impact quality of care by healthcare professionals in addition to treatment outcomes<sup>1</sup>
  - Historically people struggling with SUD have been viewed more negatively than people with psychiatric and physical disabilities, which may prevent them from seeking treatment<sup>2</sup>.
  - **Person-first language**
    - Reduces stigma and promotes honest discussion
    - Can help build positive relationships between patients and healthcare professionals
- **Employ universal substance use screenings**

1. Ashford, R.D., Brown, A.B., Curtis, B. (2018). Substance use, recovery, and linguistics: The impact of word choice on explicit and implicit bias. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* 189: 131–138.

2. Botticelli, M. & Koh, H., (2017). Changing the Language of Addiction (2016). *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 316: 13, 1362 accessed at [https://opioidpreventionandtreatment.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra506/f/wysiwyg/Botticelli\\_Changing\\_the\\_language\\_of\\_addiction\\_JAMA\\_2016\\_jvp160103.pdf](https://opioidpreventionandtreatment.ucsf.edu/sites/g/files/tkssra506/f/wysiwyg/Botticelli_Changing_the_language_of_addiction_JAMA_2016_jvp160103.pdf).

# Identifying Risks



- **Patients using substances may be at risk of various harms:**
  - Acquiring viral hepatitis (commonly hepatitis C virus [HCV])
  - Acquiring HIV
  - Endocarditis
  - Soft tissue infections (abscesses, cellulitis)
  - Damage to circulatory system, loss of limbs, and tissue
  - Overdose
  - Accidental death
  - Jail/prison
  - Stigma, shame, loss of family, friends, work & home
  - Inability/difficulty to feel joy (high) in other ways
  - Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

How can we address  
these risks?

'Meeting  
them where  
they're at...'

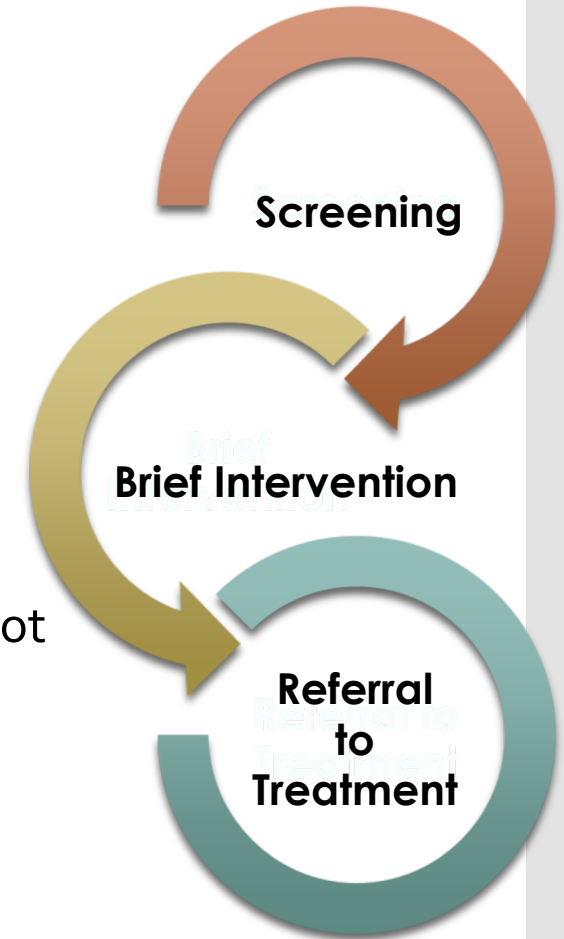
- **Addiction is a disease—not a choice**
  - The road to addiction and journey to recovery is different for everyone
- **Recognizes the importance of:**
  - **Humanism**—treating people as people
  - **Pragmatism**—none of us will ever achieve perfect health behaviors
  - **Individualism**—everyone has their own set of strengths and needs
  - **Autonomy**—everyone's choices are their own
  - **Incrementalism**—baby steps count! Any step forward is a positive one.
  - **Accountability without Termination**—people are responsible for their own behaviors. We don't 'fire' them for not achieving specific goals.



How can we practice  
harm reduction in  
primary care?

# Consider these Strategies

- Employ substance use screenings
- Perform SBIRT when applicable
  - **All staff should be trained** to do so with non-stigmatizing language
  - Connect patients to care, whether ready for or contemplating change
    - Treatment programs
    - Safe Syringe Programs
  - Consider harm reduction education for those not ready for change
    - Safer substance use
    - Naloxone
    - Safer sex practices
    - Safe syringe disposal



## Strategies Continued

- Consider buprenorphine initiation
- Provide naloxone
- Provide immunizations
- Screen for high-risk infections
  - HIV, HCV, STIs, tuberculosis, etc.



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- Activates emergency response system if no patient response

<https://neverusealone.com/>

## Promising Harm Reduction Strategy: Never Use Alone

# Lessons Learned

## Continuum of Substance Use



Harm Reduction for Engagement <https://www.essentialaccess.org/sites/default/files/files/ca-cs/BO-4-Frost-Harm-Reduction-STI-Prevention-Treatment.pdf>

# Recognize and Understand Patient Challenges

Identify and  
Overcome  
Barriers

# Roll with Resistance!





A black and white photograph showing numerous hands of various skin tones reaching upwards from the bottom and sides, framing a central text box. The hands are open, palms facing up, and are positioned against a dark, textured wooden background. The text is written in a white, serif font and is enclosed in a thin white rectangular border.

teamwork makes  
the dream work





Questions?