

# Drug and Alcohol Education for Consumer Workers and Caregivers: A Pilot Project Assessing Attitudes Toward Persons With Mental Illness and Problematic Substance Use

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With the development of peer support networks in the mental health system, formal training should be provided regarding the adverse effects of substance use. Four educational workshops were conducted with caregivers and consumer workers to increase their knowledge and confidence to support people with a dual diagnosis. Workshops were evaluated through presurvey and postsurvey. The workshops were well received, and postworkshop, participants reported fewer negative attitudes toward people with a dual diagnosis and increased understanding and knowledge regarding substance misuse. This study highlights the effectiveness of targeted workshops for caregivers and consumer workers and advocates that nurses take a more active role in educational projects involving stakeholders.

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**O**VER THE PAST two decades, there has been a growing awareness of the problem of co-occurring substance use in persons with a serious mental illness (Drake, McLaughlin, Pepper, &

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Minkoff, 1991; Mueser, Drake, Sigmon, & Brunette, 2005). Higher rates of substance use disorder are found in people with a mental illness compared with the general population (Kessler et al., 1997; Regier et al., 1990), and while prevalence rates vary, about half of all people with a serious mental illness misuse substances (Drake et al., 1990; Fowler, Carr, Carter, & Lewin, 1998; Gregg, Barrowclough, & Haddock, 2007). People with a diagnosed serious (and persistent) mental illness such as schizophrenia, psychotic illness, bipolar disorder, and major depression may not fulfill the diagnosis criteria for substance abuse or dependence, but the use of alcohol and other drugs may worsen their symptoms and/or interact dangerously with their medication (s). Mild use of alcohol or illicit drugs may be problematic for people with a serious mental illness, resulting in higher rates of adverse outcomes (Dixon, 1999; Green, Drake, Brunette, & Noordsy, 2007; Jane-Llopis & Matysina, 2006). Thus, the