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Improving Access to Collegiate Substance Use Prevention Resources

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Introduction
The incidence of substance use is rapidly increasing, and has been declared a public health epidemic. College students are at an increased risk of developing a substance use disorder as compared to the general public. Despite the vast scope of the problem, support resources are inadequate. Students at URI report not knowing what support options are available to them. Through a critical evaluation of current practices and implementation improvement strategies, a more comprehensive model of care was formed. This streamlined prevention-oriented approach could significantly improve outcomes for URI students.

Goals
- Educate students on the resources available to them
- Make access to these resources simple and effective
- Increase awareness and decrease stigma of addiction

Methods
- A literature review was conducted that analyzed
  - Data pertinent to college substance use
  - Unique characteristics of the college population
  - Methods for prevention, support, and recovery
  - Barriers to providing/receiving adequate treatment

- Interviewed department staff members from:
  - Health Education
  - The Counseling Center
  - Substance Abuse Prevention Services
  - New Student Programs

- Interviewed student leaders including:
  - Resident Assistants
  - URI 101 Mentors
  - Students in recovery

- Proposed improvements to URI Substance Abuse Prevention Services website
  - Inclusion of an emergency number
  - Addition of an updated resource list
  - Reformattting for clarity
  - Easier access from a web search

- Called for a standardized URI 101 curriculum to include substance abuse education

Implementation Strategies
1. A comprehensive resource booklet was distributed to various on-campus departments
2. Proposed improvements to URI Substance Abuse Prevention Services website
3. Proposed a standardized URI 101 curriculum plan to include substance abuse education

Discussion
- Goal Evaluation
  - Students aware of support options
  - While the resources are compiled and distributed amongst department leaders, they still need to be more widely distributed at the student level
  - Simplified access
  - Scattered resources from each department were compiled into one comprehensive document

- Increased awareness, decreased stigma
  - This project brings needed attention to a widespread health problem that does not currently receive adequate support

- Barriers to Change
  - Impaired interdepartmental communication
  - Staff reports difficulty communicating with other leaders and satisfying administrative requirements for change

- Monetary limitations
  - Funding is limited and must be allocated based on prioritization

- Recruitment of affected individuals
  - Those individuals who most require substance use treatment often fear punitive action or deny having a problem at all

- Future Considerations
  - Started a critical conversation
  - Individuals eager to continue
  - Students and staff
  - Project can be built upon
  - Implement proposed changes

- Evaluate effectiveness

Literature and Data
- A thorough literature review revealed alarming data regarding college substance use trends
- 8% of the general public has a substance use disorder, at 23%, college students far exceed the normal rate (CASA Columbia, 2007)
- Binge drinking and experimentation with substance use is common amongst college students

Planning Considerations
- Addiction is a complex disease process
- Addictive behavior is multifactorial
- Modifiable and non-modifiable risk factors
- Interventions must preserve anonymity, be easily accessible, and cost-effective

Literature Cited

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