

Section 1: Introduction

Summary

Prenatal health care services may be the first or only point of contact for women who are using alcohol or other drugs. Studies show that almost one in ten women use substances during their pregnancy and women who use are from all cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The amount of substance use may vary from abstinence to dependency. The appropriate intervention should be tailored to fit the patient's needs.

Overview of Manual

For many women using alcohol or other drugs, the visit to the health department may be the first and only point of contact with a health care agency. As a health care professional, you have a unique opportunity to assist substance-using women negotiate very difficult life decisions.

Substance use not only affects the health of a woman and her infant, it also can be a significant barrier to obtaining the effective health care services she needs.

The Regional Training Center for Family Planning (1992) wrote, "inappropriate use of alcohol and other drugs are associated with several areas of medical risk..." (p6). Because of the many other ways that substance use impacts a woman's ability to obtain health care and have a healthy delivery, this manual was developed to help professionals address these issues.

Who is the woman who abuses alcohol and other drugs?

The Regional Training Center for Family Planning wrote the following description of a woman who abuses substances:

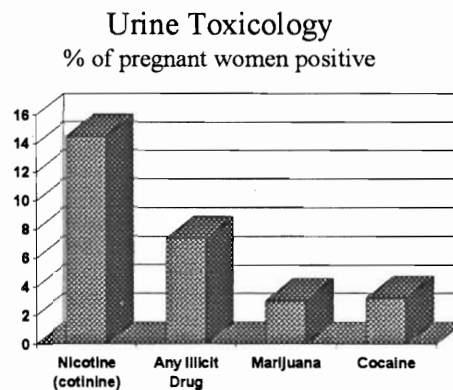
"She may be poor and forced to live in a violent situation with no access to health care or drug treatment programs. She may feel trapped by a sense of hopelessness and sincerely believe that there is no way out of her situation. The substance-abusing woman may also be middle or upper class and have access to everything society has to offer. Her financial status may enable her to hide her addiction until a urine drug screen or other crisis uncovers her disease. It is only at this point that she may be confronted with ...the need for treatment.

In most cases, the substance-abusing woman was addicted long before she became pregnant... She may feel she has the least authority and power to change her situation. Her inability to tolerate pain or difficult situations may increase with time and be replaced by panic. Many women will not admit that they are addicted. They are afraid of incarceration and/or losing custody of their children. This makes asking for and accepting help very difficult" (p59).

The authors went on to say, "drug dependent individuals frequently exhibit a strong resistance to treatment. Denying the problem is an almost reflexive response to even the most gentle confrontation. Projecting the problems on various aspects of the environment enables the drug abuser to further avoid the need for treatment. In addition, many substance users exhibit other behaviors such as manipulation and avoidance which can make your job especially challenging" (p23).

Prevalence in North Carolina

A 1994 North Carolina study found that substance use is common in pregnant women who received health care from a variety of sources, both public and private.



(Chasnoff, I. J., and Burnison, J. C., 1994, p 63)

Definitions

A variety of organizations - such as the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association - have defined alcoholism, addiction, and substance abuse (see Glossary), all varying degrees of substance use. The definition may depend on the context in which it is used.

It is important to explore one's own definitions of substance use and recognize that others may have different definitions.

The important things to do are:

- ✓ Examine your own definition of substance use: Where did it come from? Why do I believe it? Am I open to other definitions?
- ✓ Be aware that the definition of substance use changes from setting to setting. The definition that works in a clinical setting may not work in a research laboratory.
- ✓ Be aware that the definition of substance use has undergone, and may still undergo, many changes as more information becomes available.
- ✓ Allow others the freedom to create a definition that will be most useful to them, even if it is different from the American Medical Association definition or your own definition.

(Hartmann, B.R., 1990)

There are many ways to define and conceptualize substance use. There are also many different terms used (for example, "addiction," "dependence," "substance

abuse"). Depending on the context the term is used in these words may have similar or different meanings.

One way to conceptualize substance use is along a continuum. The continuum extends from "non-use" or "abstinence" (a conscious decision not to use or engage in a behavior) to "dependence" (inability to stop one's use despite harmful consequences).

A Continuum of Use

In addition to identifying where a patient's behaviors fit on the continuum, the continuum is useful to explain how a behavior may progress from one stage to another.

The continuum (on the following page) provides a framework with which to view substance use and a context for the information provided in this manual. The term "substance use" refers to use of a substance that could be at any point along this continuum.

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Substance Use Continuum

Non-Use	Experimental Use	Social Use	Problem Use	Dependence
<p>Conscious decision not to use or engage in a behavior</p> <p>Choose not to engage because of social, health, religious or other reasons</p>	<p>Infrequent, first use, or first time engaging in a behavior</p>	<p>Moderation in use</p> <p>Individual has choice about whether or not to use and/or engage in behavior</p> <p>Use may be during social events</p>	<p>Use is habitual: compulsion to use or engage in behavior begins</p> <p>Not for pleasure</p> <p>Begin to plan life around substance</p> <p>Use begins to negatively affect job, friends, family and other aspects of life</p>	<p>Little or no choice in amount or frequency of use: compulsion to use or engage in behavior</p> <p>Emotional and social deficits begin</p> <p>Pattern and increased number of serious problems associated with use</p>
<p>FOR EXAMPLE: An individual may choose not to drink because of pregnancy</p>	<p>FOR EXAMPLE: The first time an individual tries alcohol</p>	<p>FOR EXAMPLE: An individual may drink wine with dinner or at a social gathering</p>	<p>FOR EXAMPLE: An individual may drink despite complaints from family and advise of health care professional</p>	<p>FOR EXAMPLE: A woman may want to quit using because of her pregnancy and be unable to abstain without assistance</p>