The DRAM, Vol. 19(10) – Let's work together! Interprofessional education and students' knowledge of alcohol use

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To minimize the public health burden of alcohol use disorder (AUD), healthcare professionals across diverse fields must be prepared to screen patients, provide brief interventions, and refer to treatment (SBIRT). However, these skills take training, education, and communication between providers. One idea is to use interprofessional healthcare teams, where healthcare professionals coordinate and understand each others' expertise and role in patients' care. This week, The DRAM reviews a study by Scott Edwards and colleagues that examined the impact of an interprofessional education (IPE) training module on knowledge and perceptions of alcohol and AUD prevention among a group of college students studying health sciences.

What was the research question?

Will conducting a single IPE training module for college students in various health science fields improve their knowledge and perceptions related to alcohol use and AUD prevention?

What did the researchers do?

This research was carried out by faculty at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center at New Orleans as a part of their Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center of Excellence program. They conducted a two-hour long IPE training module with a group of 459, second-year students from 10 health sciences fields, including but not limited to dentistry, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and public health. The IPE training module consisted of an AUD case-based exercise aimed at increasing students' (1) recognition of the prevalence of AUD, (2) understanding of AUD symptomatology, (3) knowledge of comorbid conditions, and (4) ability to develop team-based approaches to AUD treatment/management. The students were divided into professionally diverse groups of 10, and were asked to answer a Likert Scale questionnaire regarding their knowledge and perceptions related to

alcohol use and AUD prevention before and after receiving the IPE training module. The researchers measured change over time across all participants, and separately for the different health science fields.

What did they find?

After completing the training, students supported the idea that health science professionals are responsible for implementing AUD-related interventions. Although students were not more likely to agree that their specific profession has a role in implementing brief interventions for AUD after completing the training, they did show improvements in their knowledge of – and confidence in addressing – AUD, understanding of shared professional responsibility for intervening in and treating AUD, and improving negative perceptions associated with AUD (see Figure). Specifically, students in the fields of dentistry, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and public health showed the most improvement.

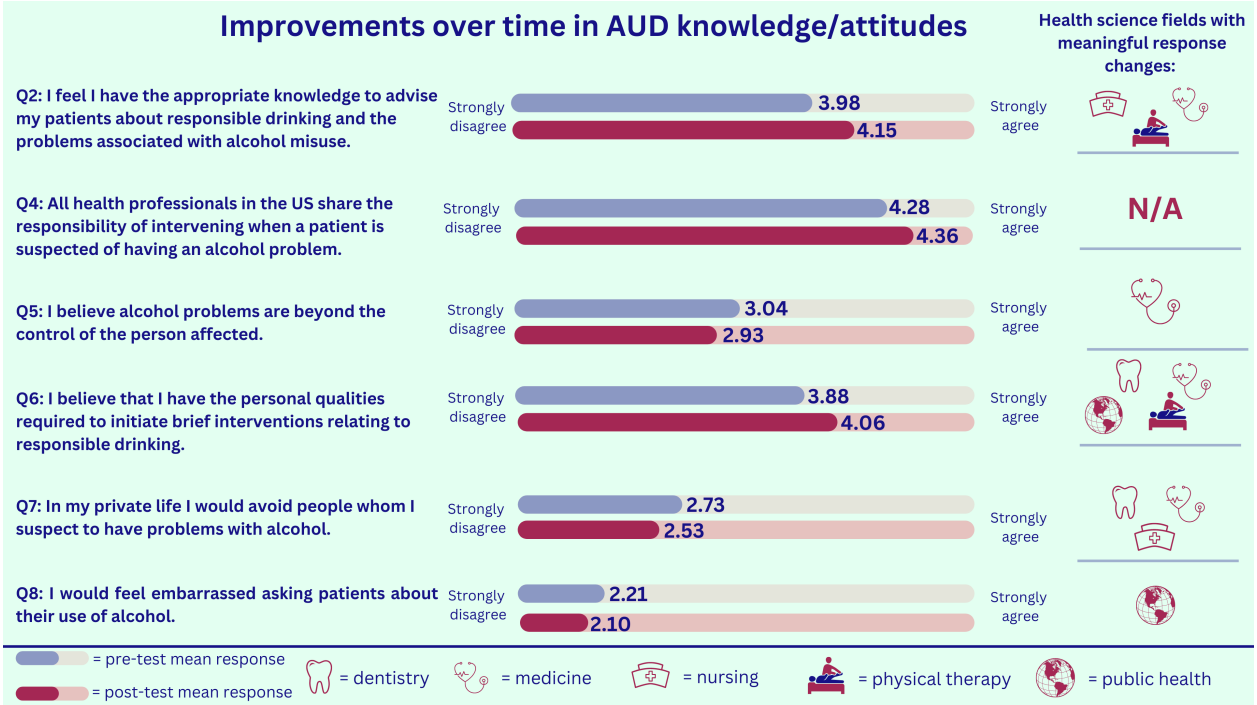

Figure. Survey questions that resulted in statistically significant changes in responses, indicated by pre-test and post-test means. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Alcohol misuse can affect a person at many different levels- physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, and socially. So, it is crucial for all health professionals to be confident in providing SBIRT interventions. Previous studies have identified a lack of training to be a barrier to screening for AUD, despite patients welcoming SBIRT tactics. This study's findings suggest that one session of IPE training

improved students' knowledge of AUD, subsequently reducing feelings of stigma and improving their confidence to implement these practices in interdisciplinary settings post-graduation. To build upon this training, researchers could offer sessions to senior and post-graduate students and include screening demonstrations by practicing providers. They could also create modified or specialized training sessions for providers with pools of patients at heightened risk for AUD, such as people living with HIV.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?
The current study's sample included a small number of participants from certain health science fields, such as cardiovascular sonography and respiratory therapy. The researchers also did not use a previously validated outcome measure, such as the Alcohol and Alcohol Problems Perception Questionnaire. Such a measure might have been more effective in determining improvement in knowledge related to alcohol use and AUD prevention.

For more information:
The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has tips and resources for people struggling with problem drinking. For additional drinking self-help tools, please visit our Addiction Resources page.

— Nakita Sconsoni, MSW

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