

Professional stigma towards clients with methamphetamine use disorder – A qualitative study

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Background: Methamphetamine use disorder (MUD) has negative healthcare outcomes on the individual and society. Literature reports stigma by healthcare professionals towards clients with other substance use disorders, however the attitude of pharmacists towards people with MUD has rarely been explored. This study aimed to explore pharmacists' perspectives surrounding their potential role in the treatment and management of MUD.

Methods: A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit community pharmacists across Sydney. Semi structured interviews examined views and ideas of pharmacists pertaining to their role in the implementation of methamphetamine treatment programs. Coding of transcribed interview data was performed by all members of the research team, and consensus reached on the generated themes emerging.

Results: Nineteen pharmacists (eleven females and eight males) completed the interviews. The main theme identified was stigma held by healthcare professionals. The almost unanimous perception amongst pharmacists was fear and apprehension towards people with MUD. Other perceptions by pharmacists included futility of treatment, and reputational harm of pharmacists involved in treatment of people with MUD. Some pharmacists strongly suggested that education and knowledge surrounding MUD was clearly necessary to enable future engagement in treatment of MUD.

Conclusion: A substantial amount of stigma towards people with MUD was found in this group of pharmacists. Negative attitudes by healthcare professionals can perpetuate healthcare disparities and impede the implementation of future treatment programs for people with MUD. Appropriate educational interventions on MUD for pharmacists are needed to address this kind of stigma, and to optimise future MUD treatment programs.