

Member's Quarterly

Winter 2024 Edition

Feature

Dealing with Addiction in the Workplace

The impact on workplace safety



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The impacts of addiction on workplace health and safety are significant and many. In addition to impaired judgment and reduced reaction times, associated impacts can include increased risk of injury to the impaired employee and co-workers, as well as potential incidents that can cause damage to buildings and equipment or even harm to the public.

Addiction can also impact productivity, damage workplace relationships, lead to greater absenteeism, workplace violence and increased stress to name a few. When it comes to addictions, it is important to recognize that there may also be employees who are impacted by their loved one's addiction. The stress of living with this situation can negatively affect their work and, of course, there may be employees who are coming to work under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol - or using these substances while on the job, which puts everyone at risk.

What is Naloxone?

As the opioid crisis continues to rise across Canada, we are seeing different unions and associations taking notice. In some provinces such as Ontario, new legislation that came into force on June 1 requires employers to make a Naloxone kit available wherever there is a risk of a worker experiencing an opioid overdose. This is creating some confusion and has identified the need for additional training for leaders, union stewards, safety coordinators and HR professionals.

In a recent conversation with Candace Plattor and Mike Russo on a webinar about addiction and its impact on workplace safety, both concurred that having clearly laid out policies and procedures is important, and so is training for employees and managers. For workplaces in Ontario that have made naloxone available, these are requirements. Naloxone is a medication that is administered to someone who has overdosed on opioids. It can quickly but temporarily reverse the effects of an opioid overdose in order to allow time for medical help to arrive. Sometimes more than one dose of Naloxone will need to be administered. It can restore normal breathing within 2 to 3 minutes in a person whose breath has slowed, or even stopped, as a result of opioid overdose. However, it is not always effective and does not work on overdoses caused from other narcotics.

Training and Other Considerations

"It's very important to be aware of and to understand the risks, as well as which organizations would be required to have Naloxone on site, as it might apply only to specific workplaces," states Mike. Candace expanded on this stating, "When you've got somebody who overdoses, they will fall down right in front of you, and they may actually be dead. This can be very jarring and extremely traumatic to anyone present. When you give Naloxone to somebody you're trying to bring back from the overdose, a lot of things can happen physically for that person. They can jolt, hit you, kick you, vomit and spit on you. They're not in control of themselves. This is why training about addictions, how to properly administer Naloxone and ensuring aftercare and counselling support for all involved is imperative. The impact can be traumatic - especially in cases where the Naloxone does not work and the person dies."

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Mike is passionate about helping workplaces reduce the risk of injuries and illnesses so they can support a healthy and safe workplace. Candace is a strong advocate for providing training in workplaces to help workers and leaders really understand addiction and the vital differences between **enabling** and **helping** to ensure that employees get the education and counselling support they need to be able to deal effectively with this very difficult situation.

A few questions to think about:

- What training, if any, does your organization provide about addiction and addictions in the workplace? Do you know the signs to look out for? Do you know how to navigate conversations where you are concerned about an employee and possible addiction?
- Are you aware of what your province's health and safety requirements are, as they relate to making Naloxone available?
- If your organization is required to have Naloxone available, do you have a documented procedure that describes who in your organization will have charge of the kit, how frequently you will inspect the kit, and the names of people trained to administer it, in addition to other requirements?

Other Strategies to help

Candace adds "It is also important for organizations to review their policies around how they deal with addiction and impairment at work and to ensure training about addiction is provided. In this way leaders can feel prepared and supported to know the signs of addiction and how to appropriately deal with it in a way that helps (such as treatment) and does not enable the employee to remain in active addiction - especially at the workplace."

Resources: Candace Plattor is an Addictions Therapist in private practice in Vancouver where she specializes in working with family and other loved ones of people who are struggling with the ravages of addiction. Candace has clients worldwide. A former opioid addict herself, she now has more than 35 years clean and sober. For more than 30 years, she has helped both families and the addicts they love understand their dysfunction behaviours and make healthier life choices. Candace is a professional speaker and the author of *Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself: The Top 10 Survival Tips for Loving Someone with an Addiction*. Visit <https://lovewithboundaries.com/> to learn more.

Mike Russo is a Health and Safety Consultant at WorkBright™ and provides consulting and develops training that reduces the risk of injuries and illnesses. WorkBright™ helps keep employees healthy, safe and productive and businesses in compliance with the law. Mike previously worked with the Infrastructure Health & Safety Association for over 13 years where his department developed some of the largest health and safety training courses in Canada. Visit www.workbright.ca to learn more.

Charmaine Hammond is President of Hammond International Inc., a professional speaker, consultant and facilitator working with organizations to reset resilience, rebuild culture and repair workplace relationships and trust. She specializes in dispute resolution, workplace collaboration and helping teams work better together. Visit <https://charmainehammond.com/> to learn more.