

Using Holistic Approaches to Solve Drug Addiction in the Homeless Population

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Homelessness can result from several reasons: job insecurity, inability to pay housing fees, and drug use. The homeless population can be found in every city worldwide, making it an eternal issue for society to solve. Over a third of homeless people in the United States use drugs and/or have alcohol addictions (Wittman, Polcin & Sheridan, 2017). They also face other struggles spanning from physical handicaps to psychological disabilities. Nurses treat individuals from diverse situations and must know how to properly care for each demographic. The purpose of this paper is to recognize the methods that can help promote substance use recovery in the homeless population. A review of literature suggests that when nurses treat homeless people with addictions, a holistic approach, including empowerment (Manning & Greenwood, 2019), technology integration (Neale & Stevenson, 2014), and healthy housing (Wittman et al., 2017), promotes recovery.

Promoting autonomy in individuals gives them a sense of control over their lives and motivates them to actively find solutions to their problems (Manning & Greenwood, 2019). The homeless population lacks the feeling of self-control as their lives are often complicated by substance use and addiction challenges (Wittman et al., 2017). Manning and Greenwood (2019) argue that providing the privilege of choice to the homeless population results in greater recovery because options create a feeling of legitimacy within the person and empowers them to make positive judgments regarding their recovery. For example, the analysts cite a story from a shelter that wanted to allow residents the option of alcohol in the facility kitchen. When the residents heard about this, many of them opposed the opportunity because they felt it conflicted with their recovery plans. They willingly refused the alcohol because they were allowed the chance to decide what was in their best interests. In contrast, Wittman et al. (2017) believe that allowing

such levels of freedom do more harm than good; individuals can fall behind on goals, leading to relapse. Instead, Wittman et al. (2017) support facilities with strict substance use regulations and staff who regularly monitor clients' statuses to ensure goals are met. To reinforce their claim, the researchers cite studies where individuals in these settings showed greater improvement in their substance use problems and long-lasting recovery when given less autonomy. Overall, homeless people may be more successful in overcoming addiction when given the opportunity to make choices in their lives (Manning & Greenwood, 2019), but they must constantly be monitored to ensure progress is being made (Wittman et al., 2017). In healthcare, nurses have the power in the nurse-client relationship to effectively monitor patients' progress towards expected goals. When caring for homeless patients, nurses should allow the patient to participate in the decision-making to allow for a higher chance of cooperation and recovery.

Research has also suggested that unconventional approaches to recovery, such as technology, should be more readily available to the homeless community (Neale & Stevenson, 2014). Many homeless people affected by drug abuse use cell phones and laptops but not for illegal activities; rather, the technology is an important connection to society for them. Technology allows for communication with family and friends, resources for treatment or employment, and literature for learning (Neale & Stevenson, 2014). In short, it is a segue for homeless people to distract themselves with learning new skills rather than turning to drugs to pass the time. This is important considering the poor literacy rates among the homeless population (Manning & Greenwood, 2019). The new skills and knowledge they gain from online sources can assist them in making informed decisions and a valiant effort in escaping their situation. Although nurses cannot provide homeless clients with technological devices, staff should understand the patient's living situation, and capacity to understand the health

information provided in consultation. Nurses should use common phrasing instead of advanced medical terminology and habitually ask the client if they understand or have any questions. Similar to how nurses must be culturally sensitive, nurses should consider limited literacy to protect the patient's dignity. Technology also allows homeless individuals to search up their symptoms online to self-diagnose and find treatments for minor injuries not requiring emergency care. Self-treating minor injuries can further strengthen their sense of autonomy and possibly lead to them seeking assistance for their addiction issues.

An environment consisting of all the life necessities, such as hygiene, and filled with people working toward similar goals can act as a motivating factor for homeless individuals aiming for recovery. When basic safety needs, such as permanent shelter, are not met, the homeless population may experience more difficulty in prioritizing cessation of drug use. Accordingly, lack of stable lodging is likely to increase the chance of the afflicted individuals relapsing (Wittman et al., 2017). Manning and Greenwood (2019) explain that, since each homeless individual deals with varying levels of issues, homeless accommodations are structurally different: some are more flexible than others and differ in what types of services they provide to residents. Likewise, Wittman et al. (2017) discuss how homeless people often pick up good habits like sobriety from their housemates when they are in a drug-free environment. The researchers reason that this type of shelter is more supportive than other options as all the residents work towards the same goal of drug and/or alcohol recovery. Therefore, for the best chance of recovery, homeless people with addictions should have access to housing that addresses their needs and presents a motivating atmosphere. When homeless clients are admitted to the hospital, acute care nurses should involve the interprofessional team. For instance, social workers can provide patients with resources to community services and assist with appropriate

discharge planning. In this way, patients will feel supported and will have the guidance they need to achieve drug use cessation.

While traditional therapeutic techniques have worked for nurses in the past, research shows that the modern approach towards drug use recovery in the homeless population is a better alternative: providing individuals with choice gives them motivation to get clean (Manning & Greenwood, 2019), using technology introduces pathways for learning (Neale & Stevenson, 2014), and offering stable housing allows the right environment for recovery to occur (Wittman et al., 2017). Further research should be done on the experiences of the homeless population with the healthcare system. Recovering from addiction is not easy; relapse can occur when care is inadequate. Therefore, nurses should strive to assist homeless patients with addictions so they can recover and get a second chance at life.

## References

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