

Reaching Out To Faculty and Staff Dealing With Addiction

The annual UCR HealthyCampus survey of faculty, staff, and student health has highlighted an issue that Healthy Campus is eager to address. This year's survey, conducted anonymously campuswide, indicates that substance use and addiction is an area of concern, particularly among faculty. The Substance Use and Addiction Subcommittee, one of nine Healthy Campus groups focused on promoting and protecting campus community well-being, faces the challenge of addressing this issue, which is cloaked in stigma. In response to the survey results, the Subcommittee is requesting help from the campus community.

Substance use disorders historically have been seen as a moral or character issue. For this reason, self-help groups insist on the anonymity of their members. Today we know that substance use disorders result from a brain disorder rather than a character flaw. Neurological studies show that addictive substances act like a sledgehammer, disrupting an array of brain and cell operations and taking over myriad functions, especially the limbic system, which controls our survival instinct. In some people, a genetic predisposition puts them at greater risk of falling prey to addictive disorders.

Access to treatment and other services is available through employee health insurance programs <https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/compensation-and-benefits/health-plans/behavioral-health/index.html>

and the employee assistance program (<https://hr.ucr.edu/employee/fsap.html>),

but studies document that sustained recovery depends on continued support. Some UC campuses offer multiple recovery meetings easily accessible to staff and faculty and peer support from campus personnel in recovery. But such programs have never existed at UCR. Given the historic misconceptions about this disorder, the Substance Use and Addiction Subcommittee is considering how best to support this portion of our community. It is taking the following steps:



1) Reaching out to the community for guidance on how to support people dealing with addiction. Suggestions on best ways to support this segment of our community may be sent to Julie Chobdee, Wellness Program Coordinator, Human Resources/Workplace Health & Wellness, at julie.chobdee@ucr.edu or Tanya Nieri, PhD, Associate Professor of Sociology at tanyan@ucr.edu, 951-827-5854 on behalf of the Substance Use and Addiction Subcommittee of UCR Healthy Campus.

2) Raising awareness about existing support resources. In addition to the above-mentioned employee benefits, local recovery meetings are available to UCR faculty and staff. A dozen or so years ago, campus members recovering from substance abuse disorders formed a campus 12-step meeting. Lacking institutional support, booking rooms on campus became progressively more difficult and the weekly noon meeting, which has now grown to three noon meetings, decamped to a room off campus in the campus Catholic chaplaincy, St. Andrews Newman Center, 105 West Big Springs Road, Riverside, 92507. Although the meetings are still attended by campus members involved with 12-step programs, they are little known on the campus. For more information, contact 951-377-2757

3) Establishing a support network for faculty and staff dealing with addiction. Frances Fernandes, a retired member of the Chancellor's Office and member of the Voicing Collegiate Recovery leadership team, a community engagement project organized by Dr. Ann Cheney in the School of Medicine, is assembling a list of faculty and staff who would be willing to receive calls from campus employees concerned about their or others substance use. The list, which will be confidential, contains only first name, whether staff or faculty, campus unit, and preferred mode of contact: phone/text/email. If you are interested in being a member of the list, please contact Frances by email, call or text at frances.fernandes@ucr.edu or 951-377-2757.