



NOAP RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Project Proposal

Project Title: Perceptions Regarding Declining Participation in Alternative to Discipline Substance Use Disorder Monitoring Programs

Submitted by: NOAP Research Committee

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Abstract:

Alternative to Discipline (ATD) substance use monitoring programs began to be utilized by state nursing boards in the early 1980s. The adoption of an alternative to discipline approach to substance misuse was primarily driven by the recognition of substance use disorder (SUD) as a clinically defined disease, the need to retain skilled nursing professionals, and the realization that public protection was best served when nurses were provided an opportunity for monitored rehabilitation.

The prevalence of nurses participating in a state approved substance use disorder monitoring program has been reported to range from 0.5 – 1.5%. This contrasts with estimates of nurses who misuse alcohol or other drugs sometime during their career to be in the 12-15% range and approximately 6% of nurses having a diagnosable substance use disorder.

Despite the traditional relatively low monitoring rates reported and the logical assumption that monitoring program participation numbers would increase in the COVID-19 era, most states are reporting a decrease

in participation numbers. Decreases are being reported in all three primary participation tracks – discipline referral, alternative to discipline, and voluntary.

Barriers to reporting and participation in monitoring have been reported in the literature including but not limited to:

1. Stigma and fear of losing their career
2. Lack of education
3. Financial stress
4. Lack of treatment access
5. Fear of criminal prosecution

Anecdotal reports regarding the current driving forces behind participation numbers include employer reluctance to report; struggling nurses voluntarily leaving the profession; and increased social acceptance of substance use. Editorially, it may also signal a change in perception regarding the position and benefits of “alternative to discipline” programs.

Project Aim:

There is an identified knowledge gap regarding the prevalence and comparable rates of participation in nursing substance use monitoring programs. In addition, there have been reports of recent declining participation numbers. This seems counterintuitive given the increased stress the healthcare workforce has been under during COVID 19 and recent research indicating an increase in alcohol use both as a coping mechanism and culturally accepted behavior.

The aim of this project is to gather information on program participation numbers/rates and begin to build a preliminary understanding of the driving forces behind declining participation numbers. This understanding will be used to direct more in-depth research.

Strategy:

All state approved monitoring programs (discipline and ATD) identified using the National Council of State Boards of Nursing program search tool, and free internet search will be invited to participate in an electronic survey.

The survey will include questions on current and past participation numbers, participation track (discipline, alternative, voluntary) trends, and perceptions on what is driving the numbers.

The survey will be constructed using the JotForm form builder tool and managed by Prime Management services. Jotform and Excel tools will be used to generate reports.

Survey respondents will be asked to identify themselves and their program. Survey submissions that lack identifiers will not be accepted. Program and personal identifiers will be excluded from all external reports.

Costs:

We don't anticipate any direct monetary costs.

Timeline:

- Project start date is November 1, 2023.
- The survey will be emailed to all state monitoring programs sometime during January 2024.
- A draft report will be provided to the NOAP Board of Directors in May 2024.
- A final report will be ready to be presented during the NOAP Annual Conference in May 2024.

Respectfully Submitted: John Furman, Research Committee Chair

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