

REALLY GOOD STUFF

Conversation Café: Lived experience in undergraduate addictions teaching

1 | WHAT PROBLEMS WERE ADDRESSED?

Scotland has the highest drug-related death rate in Europe, yet there are flourishing communities of people actively recovering from their addictions and sustaining new lives. Current undergraduate teaching on addiction has little emphasis on these community-based recovery groups and few opportunities to hear from those with lived experience (LE), despite evidence of the positive impact this has on learners.¹

2 | WHAT WAS TRIED?

The Humanising Healthcare Forum (a student group at the University of Glasgow) recognised this gap and co-created the 'Conversation Café' with local addictions services. They were implemented with academic staff in three Scottish medical schools. The Cafés bring together medical students and people in recovery to have guided conversations over tea and biscuits. The informality of the setting facilitates the sharing of authentic experience and belies the powerful impact of the conversations.

Overview of the session:

The session starts with a volunteer (pre-arranged) sharing their experience of addiction and recovery. Thereafter, the conversations begin with 15-min discussions for each of the five questions. After each 15-min period, students move to the adjacent table for another question with a different group, allowing them to meet and connect everyone from the recovery community.

Each question was carefully designed to guide conversations towards the following important themes of the addiction and recovery journey:

- Individual value of recovery
- Trauma, social circumstances, genetics
- Community resources, social prescribing, interactions with healthcare professionals
- Harm reduction
- 12-step fellowship programmes and family engagement

3 | WHAT LESSONS WERE LEARNED?

Eighty-nine medical students across the three institutions attended, incorporating students across multiple years and in different modules, for example, psychiatry and general practice.

Eighty-nine per cent rated the session 10/10 for usefulness, with a mean rating of 9.6/10.

One hundred per cent of students said they believed LE should be involved in undergraduate teaching.

Eighty-five percent of students said the session changed their beliefs about addiction, and a further 11% responded 'maybe'.

Qualitative feedback has shown the educational impact of the session:

This session was better than any lecture I've had. Speaking with people going through recovery is eye-opening and very much has changed my views on how as a future professional I can help.

The most insightful way to learn about recovery and addictions. Speaking to people in recovery has been so eye-opening and I have learned more than I could have ever learned at med school alone.


Other important themes that arose in feedback:

- 'Breaking down stigma'
- 'Effective signposting'
- 'All medics should have this opportunity'

The evaluations show the profound learning potential from the Conversation Cafes, particularly in challenging preconceptions about addiction, which adds to the evidence of the benefits of involving LE in medical education. Additionally, this novel format is impactful and achievable, and our multi-centre trial highlights its transferability.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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