



The Evidence (transcript)

Season 1, Episode 6

Topic: CCSA's Issues of Substance Conference

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[Announcer:] You're listening to The Evidence: Knowledge that inspires.

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[Announcer:] The Evidence: produced by the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction.

[Lee Arbon:] Hi, this is Lee Arbon, and I want to welcome you to a very special episode of The Evidence, CCSA's national podcast. Recently, CCSA held its national conference in Ottawa. During CCSA's Issues of Substance, our community correspondent Victoria Lewis went around and talked with many of the different vendors and attendees about their conference experience. We've compiled some of the best interviews together to put together this very special episode for you. We hope you enjoy it.

[conference noise]

[Victoria Lewis:] Hi, I'm Victoria Lewis, and we're here at CCSA's Issues of Substance 2019 conference, for The Evidence podcast. I'm speaking to some of our conference attendees about their IOS experience.

[Peter:] Hi, my name is Peter, and I'm a recovering addict. Um ... and I'm here out of interest to find out what the other — what resources are available in the community. The whole face of addiction ... has changed over the years — different substances, more dangerous things, different resources, different approaches. And, so I'm gathering information and talking to people, just trying to get a sense of where they're at, and I've talked to a couple of mil- not military, but police, RCMP and OPP about being able to collaborate with them perhaps, and give them- help them educate their officers and their programs in terms of what addiction looks like from my side of the table.

[2:00]

[VL:] Thanks. I mean, if there's one thing you can take away from this conference so far, what do you think that might be?

[P:] I think the sheer numbers of people that are here and interested in — first off, involved in the field, and interested in learning more and, you know, there's a synergy going on here, and I heard somebody say, "The only thing wrong with this conference is you only have it every two years." And the response that I heard was, "We're trying to have it every year from here on in." Cause there's a



need for it, you know, addiction is a huge problem, there's dangerous substances out there. I mean, there always were, but it's much more — I mean, it's lethal now. And it's starting younger, it's a lot more fatal, there's a lot more fatalities. So the fact that there's so many organizations that are looking to, to work together to help addicts and, you know, with various different programs, you know, sometimes it's complete abstinence, and sometimes it's harm reduction, and sometimes it's just having the faci- the availability of... naloxone and Narcan and stuff like that to keep people from dying.

[sound cuts]

[VL:] So, we're joined by Nancy Carnide from the Institute for Work and Health. Nancy, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us on The Evidence. Tell me a bit about the presentation that you've given at Issues of Substance this year.

[Nancy Carnide:] Yes, so, I presented on some work that we're doing, looking at cannabis use among Canadian workers, so we have a cohort study where we're following a group of workers from pre-legalization, the time period in pre-legalization, forward, after legalization, to better understand how their use patterns may be changing, particularly their use before and at work. And what the perceptions of all workers are around the risks of using cannabis at work, what the workplace norms are around use, and, you know, what they actually know about the effects of cannabis.

[4:13]

[VL:] Are you able to give a little bit of information about maybe some of the early findings of this study?

[NC:] Yes, so I've presented predominantly on the baseline findings. So that was from the pre-legalization period, and what we essentially found, even before legalization, is that, while most workers are I think using cannabis in a responsible way, they're not using it before and at work, we did find what we thought was a non-trivial proportion of workers—about 1 in 5—were using cannabis, either in the two hours leading up to work or at some point during work, so while working or on breaks. And we saw this both in people that were in safety-sensitive positions—so positions that could be a potential safety risk if they're impaired—but also in non-safety-sensitive positions. So we saw that across the board. And again, this was happening already before legalization. And then we also noticed that there were some problematic perceptions of risk in terms of whether they thought it would be risky to use cannabis before or at work. Most workers did think it was risky to use at work, or before a hazardous work task, which I think is reassuring, but there were a fewer number of workers who thought it would be risky to use in the two hours leading up to work. And so I think that can be potentially problematic in terms of any potential residual effects, that can spill over to the workplace, in terms of impairment. And we also saw some knowledge deficits. So some workers thought that it would be okay to use cannabis either for non-medical or medical purposes after legalization at work. Some didn't know whether they had a substance use policy at work, and some reported that they didn't have one, and that's I think an education gap.

[VL:] So, you said that you were presenting on results from pre-legalization. When do you expect to have some, sort of, early findings from cannabis use at work post-legalization?

[6:20]

[NC:] Yeah, so ... We do have, we have some — a little bit that we're just starting to get into the data now. I hesitate to sort of say anything just yet, but we will- we should have some findings by next year, early next year. In terms of cannabis use with workers, I think it's really important to educate workers. I think that's going to be the key piece going forward and being proactive about it, I think



policies are great, we need policies in workplaces around substance use, you know, what the expectations are and what the consequences are of not meeting those expectations, but at the same time, I think we also need to, we need to be more proactive and educate workers that they — if they are going to use cannabis, because it is now legal, they need to- you know, we need to make sure that they do so in a way that is less risky for you.

[VL:] Thank you very much, for taking some time out to talk to us.

[N:] Thank you very much for inviting me.

[David Hodgins:] I'm David Hodgins, I'm a professor of psychology at the University of Calgary.

[VL:] So, we are thrilled to have you here at CCSA's Issues of Substance conference. Can you tell me about the presentation that you've given at the conference?

[DH:] I was honoured to be able to present the results of our project that is aimed at developing Canada's first lower-risk gambling guidelines. It's been a lengthy, complex project, very exciting, and we're just at the tail end. So we were able to present some initial results and get some feedback from people who were in the audience. So it was really, really a great experience.

[VL:] What do you hope to achieve with the release of Canada's national lower-risk gambling guidelines?

[8:08]

[DH:] So, gambling has been something that we've focused on for, you know, really the last 25 years, and, you know, we've been giving advice to people about how to stay away from problematic gambling. The advice we've given has been not bad, but pretty general, so taglines like "set a limit, keep within it" is really the message, the public health message that we've been able to provide. So this project is now looking at developing what we refer to as quantitative guidelines, so some — a little bit more meaty numbers that people can use in regulating their own gambling. So, how often can you gamble? How much money can you gamble before you're likely to develop problems?

[VL:] Tell us about the University of Calgary's Addictive Behaviours Lab.

[DH:] So, I'm with the Department of Psychology, so I'm very lucky to have a group of very talented graduate students working with me. So mostly the lab is focused on supporting doctoral students and master's students in pursuing their research interests. The theme of the lab is around processes of recovery, so how people develop and how people recover from addictive behaviours. We're doing a lot of work in the gambling area, video games, as well as Canada's opioids and of course our number one addiction in Canada is alcohol.

[VL:] Um, it's actually National Addictions Awareness Week this week. And the theme is "Stigma Ends With Me." So in your role as a researcher on the process of recovery, have you explored how stigma can be a barrier to recovery?

[10:05]

[DH:] Stigma can be a huge barrier to recovery. In our work with people with gambling problems, we interviewed people who had recovered. Some of them had recovered by going to treatment, and some of them had recovered through their own processes, without going for treatment. And we asked them a lot about what took them so long to go for treatment, why did they not go for treatment, and always sort of very high on the list is stigma. People will often not use the word *stigma* and they will say, "Well, I was just too ashamed," and "I was just too embarrassed," and



there's sort of these emotional reasons that, really, keep them away from beginning a recovery process.

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[11:35]

[VL:] So, we're back at CCSA's Issues of Substance 2019, and I'm here in the exhibition hall speaking to some of our exhibitors. So we are here with Mélanie Perrier, from the RCMP. Mélanie, tell me what you're doing here today.

[Mélanie Perrier:] Well, basically, I come from the Drug and Organized Awareness Services, so our job is also to work in prevention, and bring awareness to the general population but also to different types of clientele. So what we do basically is we create awareness tools that we—how do you say—that we bring to the general public that are available actually for free, either on our website or we've got some drug awareness charts, we've got a mobile app as well that's been out for a couple years, but that is still available and still current, with all the information that we provide on drugs and new trends.

So we're here to talk about our service as well, but as well, we have our drug awareness chart that's been released just a couple weeks ago. So we're here to promote that tool and give it away to people that wanted it, so we're really happy because we got some people from all across the country that have come to the booth, and we're able to share experiences, discuss about the issues and, as well, I think one of the things that we've seen when we discussed with people is that, being a police officer, there's always some sort of stigma that we don't really understand some of the issues and what's going on.

And we just want to show people that we do prevention as well, and we do understand what's going on, and we work hand-in-hand with the people on the field, and I think it's a balance that we need between, you know, prevention and, as well, the work that is done on the field by the officers. But without the input of, you know, the community workers that we're working with, we can't do our work either, so we got to work together. So it was an amazing way to open discussions and, and eventually maybe work together with some of the people we've met here, so yeah!

[13:58]

[VL:] That's so positive. Can you tell me a bit about the drug awareness chart?

[MP:] Yes, well, it is actually our second version. We've released the first version way back in 2014. So, what we thought we were looking at out there at all the tools that exist and we wanted to create a tool that would inform people from different fields, either youth, you know, in schools all the way up to street workers about what's out there really, what are the drugs that we mostly see, what they are, their appearance—we've put some pictures of real substances—, what are the side effects, you know, and some really important prevention messages related to those substances.

[VL:] So, how can people access the drug awareness chart?

[MP:] Well, actually, even if we're, you know, posted in the province of Quebec, it is available for anybody that wants it across Canada, but across the world actually. We've had demands from all



over the world. But they can actually go on their regular web browser and type “RCMP drug awareness chart” and it would take them to our website where they could find our email address and send us an email, but as well, they could find links to our other tools. We have, like I mentioned, a mobile app as well that is available, cause most of the substances on the chart — well, all of them — are on our mobile app, but as well there’s way more substances information on them on the mobile app as well.

[VL:] Sounds like you have some really good tools, and you’re doing some great work ...

[MP:] Yes, yeah!

[VL:] ... so thank you so much ...

[MP:] You’re welcome.

[VL:] ... for talking to us and for being here today.

[MP:] Thank you!

[VL:] Thank you!

[Rebecca Phillips Konigs:] My name is Rebecca Phillips Konigs, and I’m the assistant manager of special projects. So I’m in an area of CAMH, so the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, I’m in an area of that organization called PSSP, or the Provincial System Support Program. So, within PSSP, I work in knowledge exchange, and so that’s sort of why I’m here today, talking about a project that we have going on.

[16:00]

[VL:] So yeah, tell me a little bit more about why you are here today and the project that you’re talking about.

[RPK:] Sure, so, we’re here promoting the Cannabis Knowledge Exchange Hub. So the Hub is going to be an online place that people can go that has credible, curated cannabis information. So it’s basically a one-stop shop for vetted cannabis resources. So we know that there’s a lot of different cannabis resources out there, produced by many different groups, and how some may have biases, some are evidence-based. So we basically looked through all of that and brought it together in one place. And so the website is being launched in January, so in the new year, and you’ll be able to go to that website, and kind of filter the results that you’re looking for. So if you’re wanting something for a certain target audience or on a certain topic, you can search there. The website will also have an interactive discussion forum. So that’s why we’re here, just promoting some of the resources that will be on the Hub.

[VL:] Okay, and you said the website will be live in January?

[RPK:] Yeah.

[VL:] How will people be able to access it? Do you have a web address already or...?

[RPK:] Yes, yes, so the link to the website will be www.cannabis-hub.ca.

[VL:] Great. And I assume it’ll be bilingual, will it?

[RPK:] Yes, yes. So we are funded by Health Canada, so there’ll be an English side of it, and then a French side, and again with the interactive discussion forums, there will be a discussion forum in French and in English.

[VL:] Awesome. Sounds like a great project.



[RPK:] Yeah, yeah, it's been really fun!

[VL:] So, is this your first Issues of Substance conference?

[RPK:] This is my first one, yes.

[VL:] And how have you found it so far?

[RPK:] It's been a great experience. It's nice to connect with people across the country. So in CAMH, we're located in Ontario, and most of the work we do is in Ontario, so opportunities like this are great because we can see people from across Canada. We've had a lot of people from different sectors stop at the booth, so, you know, from education to mental health and addictions to law enforcement. So it's really great to like, kind of connect with people across sectors.

[18:04]

[VL:] That's great, thank you so much for your time.

[RPK:] You're welcome.

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[ANNOUNCER:] This is The Evidence. If you find today's topic interesting, be sure to visit ccsa.ca for more information.

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[LA:] Well, that's a wrap. And that brings us to a close of our very special episode of The Evidence, live at Issues of Substance. We hope you enjoyed it. We want to thank all 650+ attendees who attended the conference to make it a resounding success. We had a great time, we hope you had a great time. And we look forward to announcing next year where we're going in 2021. We'll see you next time on The Evidence.

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