

# HARM REDUCTION IN NURSING EDUCATION: A CALL TO ACT

**Authors:** Chloe Pontalti, Brandy Palmer, Corey Ranger, Vera Caine, Meaghan Brown, Bernie Pauly, Bruce Wallace  
**Institution:** University of Victoria, Canada

## CASE STUDY: A MODEL COURSE

*This course was created in collaboration with the Harm Reduction Nurses Association*

Harm Reduction: Principles and Practice is an undergraduate and graduate course in nursing and social work at the University of Victoria. It offers an exemplary model, emphasizing harm reduction as a foundational practice competency.



## KEY TOPICS

- History & theories of drug use and policy
- Social justice & equity frameworks
- Indigenous perspectives & decolonization
- Safe consumption, overdose prevention, HR in acute care, addiction medicine, & safe supply
- Intersectionality and systemic policy reform

## WHAT IS HARM REDUCTION (HR)?

- A pragmatic, evidence-based approach that reduces health and social harms linked to higher risk behaviours, like substance use.
- Does not rely on abstinence alone—focuses on health, safety, and human rights
- Acknowledges the complexity and prevalence of substance use in communities and “meets people where they’re at”
- A universal philosophy of care—not limited by setting or population
- All nurses can apply harm reduction principles in any setting

### BARRIERS TO INTEGRATION

- FACULTY STIGMA TOWARD PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS
- HR EDUCATION DEPENDS ON INDIVIDUAL FACULTY INTEREST
- CURRICULA ARE OVERLOADED
- NCLEX & ENTRY TO PRACTICE GUIDELINES LACK HR-SPECIFIC CONTENT
- RELIANCE ON UNPAID LABOUR OF PASSIONATE FACULTY

### CURRICULAR GAP

- HR EDUCATION INFREQUENT OR ABSENT
- IF AT ALL, IT’S EMBEDDED IN OTHER COURSES, OFTEN ELECTIVES (E.G., ADDICTIONS, MENTAL HEALTH)
- LIMITED INSTRUCTION TIME

## CURRENT STATE OF HARM REDUCTION EDUCATION IN CANADIAN NURSING CURRICULA



### OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE

- COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
- EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN OVERDOSE PREVENTION SITES, COMMUNITY ORGS
- FUNDING FOR EQUITY AND FAIR COMPENSATION
- HR TRAINING FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

### CONSEQUENCES

- UNFAIR TREATMENT OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN HEALTHCARE
- POOR HEALTH OUTCOMES (MISSED OVERDOSES, STIGMA-BASED CARE)
- NURSE BURNOUT & MORAL DISTRESS

## NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

The curriculum involves equitable, compensated partnerships with individuals who have lived/living experience of criminalized drug use, ensuring ethical collaboration.



## QR CODE TO ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN



Harm Reduction Nurses Association  
Association des infirmiers et infirmières en réduction des méfaits



Harm reduction aligns with Canadian Nurses Association standards of *dignity, justice, and evidence based care.*

## MOVING FORWARD, PRIORITIES INCLUDE...

- Formal course evaluation
- Course accreditation with the Canadian Nurses Association
- Scheduled second offering in Fall 2025
- Enhanced accessibility across care disciplines and geographic regions
- Institutional and resource support for faculty development in harm reduction principles and practices
- Equitable, financially supported partnerships with community organizations
- Structured experiential learning placements
- Advocate for harm reduction competencies in entry-to-practice guidelines and licensing examinations



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