

UW-Madison- CHES Group | Sean Bear: Cultural Factors within substance use

MAUREEN:

As well as come to the realization of what our ancestors already know-- that we're all brothers and sisters under one creator. Little information about the Great Lakes ATTC. We are hosting a webinar today, and we are one of 10 US-based based regional and six international HIV ATTC Centers along with two national focus area centers and a network coordinating office. The Great Lakes ATTC serves the six states in the Upper Midwest, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. All of the ATTCs are funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

A little bit about the National American Indian and Alaska Native ATTC, it's one of two national focus area centers within our network. The focus is on American Indian and Alaska Native community and behavioral health issues that they face. The American Indian Alaska Native ATTC is based at the University of Iowa College of Public Health. And again, like all of the centers across the network, it's funded by SAMHSA. Thank you.

And now I'd like to just go through a couple of webinar housekeeping items. The audio is broadcast through your computer's speakers. So you need to make sure that they're turned on and up. There's no call in number available for this webinar. You can use the chat question feature throughout the webinar to ask questions or comments. We will have a Q and A session after Sean's presentation. And all the webinars that we offer are recorded and will be available for viewing along with the PowerPoint slides that will be posted on our website within the next couple of weeks after today's presentation. And now I'd like to turn the presentation over to our presenter, Sean Bear.

SEAN A. BEAR :

Hey. Hello, everyone. Again, my name is Sean Bear. I am from the Meskwaki tribe in Tama, Iowa. Like they were saying, I was in the military. After I got out of the military, I had some difficulty I guess coming into like civilian life.

So during that time what I did was to reach out to my elders, reach out to people within the family, and eventually what I did was to find some medicine people who could help me. But during that time, span of a long period of time, I was able to travel across the United States into Canada meeting many medicine people and healers across the United States and Canada. I really enjoyed that time. I mean, it was really helpful. I was able to find a few that were able to assist me. So it was very interesting and quite informative. So I still keep in contact with them as well. Although, some over the years have passed away.

So the cultural factors within substance use and native holistic perspective, I'm, kind of, looking more at the spiritual aspects of substance use. There are some information as well about the brain and how the body, kind of, [AUDIO OUT] over time from using substances.

OK, so as we get in here-- OK, so who we are with the National American Indian and Alaska ATTC, you'll see here that we are a national center helping natives across the United States. At times there has been some collaboration I think in the past years with those in Canada, I believe. But we also work in Alaska.

From this map here you'll see that the IHS maps and the ATTC regional areas do not necessarily mix. So you'll see some IHS areas that have been able to work with other ATTCs. OK, first point in this is that there have been many different myths of Native American ceremonies and spiritual practice. Yet to be accurate from a culturally informed perspective, we must also look at the believes from a culture itself.

So one of the myths that we have heard and different trainings we have done in the past was that medicine people and/or native smoked marijuana with a sacred pipe. As we know, that's really not true. If a person is truly walking a good path, they will not smoke marijuana in a sacred pipe. The sacred pipe is to be used in prayer. So you're looking at that from a sacred manner and respecting that pipe. Because from our belief system that pipe is alive. So but looking at the different tribal areas across the country, there are different kind of tobacco, different kind of things that people use in order to smoke with this pipe in prayer. Some use tobacco. The plains of course, many of them use the canchasa. In the area, I know there are those who may use tobacco or kinnikinnick, which is a similar form of canchasa but with other kinds of things added in there. And, of course, in the southwest, I have known that people use also the mountain tobacco there. Not all tribes, not all tribes use tobacco that are meant to be smoked. There are some that you're not supposed to smoke at all, but they're only used in prayer. And some are placed in the fire. Some are placed in certain areas, maybe on stones or trees or let go in the wind or something like that. So these are able to be used in prayer.

So looking at cultural beliefs for medicine men and healers from across the United States and Canada, I have learned many beliefs and ways to look at things. Even though many of the ceremonies and practices and beliefs look different, I have noticed that many of the spiritual knowledge remains either very close or the same. That's what was very interesting working with different medicine peoples around the country, because spiritually many of those beliefs are the same.

But we must also look at the deeper knowledge base, so where certain beliefs and teachings derive. So it's like Turtle Island. Turtle Island is-- it has the creation story. So it's utilizing the turtle from the creation story as Turtle Island, which would may be very different from beliefs across the United States, especially in the middle of the country where they might talk about Turtle Island a little bit differently. One way I look at that is that, well, with the Algonquin families they have the story of within their creation story with Turtle Island.

So as we look at some of these older belief systems and things, in creation we believe that everything has a spirit, the trees, the stones, even the air we breathe, of course, the creator, the earth, water or spirits within the water. There are many different forms of spirit within creation, like, all animals and different things like that. So of course, we have the creator. We had the grandmothers and grandfathers of four directions, spirits and nature. Of course, all humans have a spirit.

But the thing about it is with other teachings is that there are also natural things, and many times those are man-made. Changing the original form from-- such as ore into metal it tendency to be dark. So and within the native culture is that metal brings war. So when they began to bring metal into the country and to utilize that, we see metal in war. OK, so looking at alcohol, remember there are various kinds of alcohol throughout the world. But here we normally see liquor, wine, and beer. We have seen from studies there are writings that there was no alcohol in the United States. They're also an exception of the possibility that there were some alcohol in the southwest close to what is now the Mexico border. All the stories had said we had no alcohol. From teachings and working with medicine people, there is a knowledge that there are evil spirits associated with wine, beer, and liquor. Long ago if you're looking at this from a perspective from in the past, many of the peoples were gifted with spiritual gifts, so sight, healing, maybe in speaking to many of the spirits within nature and creations.

Later on, our belief is that we are intro-- liquor, wine, and beer were introduced to the Native Americans by Europeans. Our ancestors said to stay away from these as the spirits of these were evil. So as we look a little bit more at that looking from the perspective of working with these medicine people, they were able to share the stories of things about these is that liquor, wine, and beer, they all had a separate spirit. They were different, but they were all very similar in a way. So the way they affected people, the way that when somebody consumed any of these substances that really it's like putting the spirit within the person. So in a sense, those spirits would feel invited.

OK, so looking at stimulant abuse, as we see from research, stimulants have symptoms which help others identify the substance they may be using. And of course, we see the consequences of the use within withdrawal. So with stimulants we see that there's an increased alertness, attention, and energy, elevated blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, cardiovascular disease, psychosis, and suicide.

From the withdrawal, we see fatigue, depression, and disturbances of sleep, feelings of hostility, aggression, high body temperature, cardiovascular system, suicide in withdrawal from meth we may also see. So if you're looking at many of the substance abuse, the withdrawal, many people experience the opposite of how these substances affect them.

But looking at how stimulants affect not only the individual, but we look at a little bit further out from how it affects the community. Long ago, each individual with a tribe understood the consequences of abuse, which is-- which was very frowned upon. With consequences of any abuse, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and others were dealt with severe consequences that they may affect the community itself. Looking at that from a more of a spiritual way of looking at things, abuse, hatred, anger, many of these also may draw the attention of spirits that may cause further harm to the people.

So we may see increase in violence, increase in crime, effects on the children, of course, when we see labs that are confiscated-- sometimes like with methamphetamine, the house may need to be destroyed and to rebuild-- increase of abuse of spouse, children, and animals, increase on sexual activities, increase in sexual abuse of children. So many of looking at these things is from that point-of-view is that spiritually the spirits that are associated with substance abuse or behaviors, thoughts, feelings, these things tend to feed off of certain kind of energy. Those that are more angry or hateful, these feed on those. There are those who will feed on fear, which is very common. Those within a substance abuse, of course, they will be tended to go towards those people who are using those substances.

So from looking at methamphetamines, there are-- while working with two medicine men, one in Minnesota and one in Ontario, I had the opportunity to assist in healings that had substance abuse issues, which is being methamphetamines on this one is that while we were working with these people there was one that was very memorable. This was a very strong medicine person. And during the ceremony, they were able to look at what was bothering this person. Of course, during the ceremonies beforehand, they tell you it's, like, don't be afraid. Whatever you see, remember it cannot hurt you. Whatever is going on, don't think of that. Just let it pass you. Don't attach any kind of meaning to things just to look at this from more an outside point- of-view.

During this healing, the spirit was seen, and that spirit had an attachment or attached to methamphetamine.

So afterwards, the medicine man was able to tell you this is the spirit of methamphetamines. The person was sitting there, of course, this being or whatever it was trying to get this person to use. And of course, those, kind of, things are not always either seen or heard by those who are using substances or anybody around them, but these are things that are going on and it tends to influence the person.

This being wanted this person to keep using. The person kept saying, no, I don't want anything to do with this anymore. At the very end, which was very kind of scary is that the spirit said we will be waiting. So they're going to wait for this person to use again. And later on from this account speaking with this medicine person later on, I said, wow, what does this mean? Why did they say we when it was all alone?

He said you need to look at this from different areas of the belief systems around the world. He had said with different belief systems there are things in the past that have happened when these beings have said they were legion. So it's not just talking about from their own point of view is that there are many of these beings

wherever methamphetamine is being used. And when people do a lot of meth, they feel invited. So a lot of times he had said that these are maybe in the household where people are you utilizing methamphetamine or making it wherever meth is present, chances are these beings are there. So then later on working with other medicine peoples, of course, then we're able to look at some things around ice, which is the newer form of methamphetamine. So with ice, again, this spirit we're seeing is evil. One thing that what was reported from medicine people is that many of the people that they had seen reported this out chirping sounds. But when they looked further at that and looking not just at the tripping sounds but people who would define it as locusts, then there was something a little more concerned to look at. Because the locusts represent an evil wrath, famine. But like methamphetamine, when ice is around is that these beings are round, and they also feel invited wherever they're at.

OK, so then a little bit more look at synthetic cannabinoids. Now although marijuana is not indigenous to the United States, different medicine people have different views of how marijuana is seen. But I have yet to see any who says there is a negative spirit with it. That does not mean that the effects of the use may not have a-- may cause a weakness it might use against the person, but for some it is not accepted. For others, they do accept that. But it's the way that the people utilize these substances and what is going on within the people that may bring some spirits to them.

But unlike marijuana, the synthetic and adenoids are man-made. This is not indigenous to the Americas. Marijuana is not indigenous to the Americas. That was brought over from Asian countries. Looking at synthetic cannabinoids is science has said that they kind of act like a master key and to open up many other cannabinoid receptors. So they see a very large array of symptoms and stuff like that with those are using substances. What is found spirituality is that it seems to show the user of what may come to them if they do not change. That's what was very evident with speaking with many of the medicine people is that synthetic cannabinoids seem to show the person that if they do not change the way they live their lives, those are the things that they may see. And many of these, some are what they see is darkness. They cannot find anyone else. It's like they're alone in the world.

Looking at the darkness part is they do say that when people pass that they have not lived a very good life at all. There are places after life where there are places of darkness just like what is described, but those who see darkness within synthetic cannabinoids is that they wander. They wander around looking for other people, but they will not find it. A lot of times it's very quiet just darkness, and they're just wandering around. That's something that's very, kind of, scary, but it's meant to also teach that person or being a lesson.

So also is there are those who utilize a synthetic cannabinoids is they might find themselves on fire. They're terrified, screaming, or they find themselves in a place where they or others are burning, and the way describe-- they describe is as a lake of fire. There are those that are like zombie-like. Many say they are different teachings and practices around the world or within the native community is that they say they're already here. I mean, without life once they pass they may still wander for that same substance that they were using before, because that is what gives them sustenance. So it's very important to walk your life in a good way and to do good things and things like that, because without that, you're just wandering around and without all the love and compassion and things within us that are supposed to be there.

OK, so then we're looking at a little differently from synthetic cannabinoids is that these are different various street names. Of course, there's a lot of them, but these are the ones that I picked out of there because of the wording they use. So voodoo, blue haze, kaos, dark night, black mamba, earthquake, zombie, Yucatan fire, demon passion, magma, a lot of these are based upon from the effects that those users have when they're using that substance.

There is one other thing that's very interesting is that you need to look at how these substances are made. When they make these substances, kind of, green leaky substances, they put in these great big bins. Going through that I, kind of, drew this is that you see where it says one time. This lighter color, in a sense, represents that one path of when they're spraying these chemicals on those green leaky substances.

But as they go back and forth, of course, with spraying it in between the spraying, you'll see an overlap there where then, of course, those overlap are like twice as time-- twice the strength as those who are passed just once. Then they get done, and then they make a path the other direction. So then when they're passing through these points that are just already have or are two times over because of the overlap, then you have another third overlap. And of course, when they overlap those and spraying them back and forth again, then you have a fourth overlap. The problem is that because you don't really know which part of the substance you're going to get.

OK, so looking at the effects of use, of course, from research we now have further information of how synthetic substances may affect the person, but you need to remember also from earlier what we talked about with medicines, talk about man-made things tend to be negative, as they utilize natural things in creating something that is now unnatural. So it tends to be a dark, kind of, thing. So during this, the effects may last one to eight hours with a three to five minute onset.

Of course, they report dysphoria that usually makes intense visions of hell, hallucinations, of course, paranoia-- those are similar to PCP-- delusions, long term effects are unknown. Over time, I think that with science, research will begin to get more and more information. But normally, we're a little behind than where those who are making it on the street are. With this one here, they always seem to have something that is already made. So when they outlaw the other one, they put more on the street.

Looking at the brain, of course, so the brain-- looking at the brain, it's more of a master control center of bodily functions. It wants everything to be regulated, in balance. It doesn't really like things to be out of balance. So when somebody brings a certain substance within their body, the body is going to react. Let's say, for instance, they take a stimulant, methamphetamine, cocaine, different things like that. Right away they're going to get a boost of energy. So the energy goes up, but what happens is the body says-- or the brain is going to say this is too high. We need to adjust. So normally they adjust the line in a sense that is at the normal level. So that line goes down. So the next time that they utilize again, it won't-- they won't reach that same level again unless, of course, they're either using stronger substance or more of the same.

So what happens over time is it fluctuates up and down while the brain is still trying to balance everything out. Normally what happens is when we see users or client's patients when they reach the treatment level and they're off of substance abuse, substances, they're kind of imbalanced and stuff is way off balance and we'll tend to see them very low. So we're looking at that point-of-view from withdrawal symptoms. So before the way that their substance affected you was to bring you energy. But when they're coming down, they're going to be lack of energy.

So when we're seeing this it's like we know that now from different studies is that from

marijuana it may take six months to a year before this chemistry is able to balance out again. With methamphetamine, there are those that can say to a year to two years. Of course, looking at the way that the body, kind of, is supposed to gain new cells every seven years, some may go with that. But the thing is the way we approach clients when they-- when they're coming into treatment, we need to look at it from their level. We cannot expect them to be at our level.

But then again looking at where they are and chances are, I mean, do they ever reach that normal level again or will it be a little slightly different? That's a little-- that's different. As we see today, there are many people using LSD within studies. Some are using like peyote and things like that.

But looking at it from a native perspective is we're taught that there is no shortcut. If people are using these in order to reach a higher level of consciousness or enlightenment or things like that, it's going to be short term. It's not going to be something that is fixed and stays. So they won't be long-lasting. The only way to be able to reach these levels is by going through the journey itself. To reach those levels of consciousness in a sense and changing the way we think within ourselves, but we're also not just looking at how we think but the core in a sense of ourselves.

But also we look at hallucinations, because some may utilize a substance may have hallucinations, they may be in a certain way when on these substances. But when they come off of those substance, those don't go away which has been reported that there's something going on here. From a spiritual perspective is that have they opened a door that is not meant to be opened?

Because looking at our brain, we only use approximately 10% of our brain. But we're looking at like some of these substances and the way they activate the brain. With different studies and stuff, they're looking at the brain and activity within the brain sometimes for areas that are not normally activated. So a lot of those we see with those are like with methamphetamine. There are also cases of mental health where they may be similar, such as schizophrenia.

So looking at that from there if this door in a sense is open, in a sense they may not have the control over this. And what that, kind of, relates to is that when medicine people or healers are, kind of, coming up through their life, they may also come to a point where their gift opens up. And during that time, they may not totally have control over it. Long ago, medicine people would know when a child is gifted. They would oversee them while they're growing up and groom them that way to be able to help them throughout their life and be ready when those difficulties came. But today, we have many people with gifts who are-- their gifts are opening up without the medicine people around that can help them through that. And I think therein lies some of the difficulties.

OK, so substances from the native point-of-view is seen as a weakness or avenue of evil getting into someone. There is a spirit of addiction. I know I've heard some healers talk about the spirit of addiction and that working to remove this spirit from people and especially if they're addicted to certain substances like tobacco. Spirits of substance abuse, of course, depending upon what substance they're using.

Looking at evil beings attaching or getting into the people, it's like possession but not. It's said that many people have them, which may become attached by many weaknesses of man, such

as moments of anger, despair, racism, violence, and other lower vibrational energies. But when they change the way that they think, those things will just go along-- just go away on their own. It is said that the evil beings seek the substance energies that are more like themselves, such as those like I said before.

Those of hatred seek hatred. Those of anger seek anger. Because looking from a cultural point-of-view from a spiritual aspect, all your thoughts, your feelings, emotions, your actions, they all have an energy to it. So depending upon what those are and what those beings in a sense intake for themselves for sustenance is what they're going to be looking for.

OK, on a good note, there is help. I know it sounds kind of scary sometimes, but we need to look at that also from a different point-of-view. OK, from teachings to fasting, there are ways of fast in many different ways across the nation. It is said that for some things in life, the only way to get the help is to fast, and that's going without food and water for depending upon days if the fast could be overseen by medicine peoples who are those who have a lot of experience doing this.

But looking at fasting from more of a clinical point-of-view is that fasting is also very similar to abstinence. When a person comes into treatment and they abstain from those substances, that's a fasting. They're not taking something that they normally did. Of course, from a cultural perspective, the way that many people look at fasting is they're going to go without food and water. Many of the time that's like very common is four days.

So I wanted to put that point out there about abstinence. A lot of times with that they say over time, if they're able to stay away from these things over time, those things will not be able to stay. They may try to get the person to use again by in a sense affecting the person maybe somehow the way they self-talk or something, but if they keep staying strong with that, the spirit seems to get further and further away.

OK, so dreams, looking at dream therapy or dream analysis, of course, psychoanalysis, dreams represent wish fulfillment, unconscious desires, and conflicts. There's also dream interpretations, so process of assigning meaning to dreams. Looking at it from cultural differences, culturally, Native Americans are different in assigning meaning to dreams. They should be looked at from a native cultural perspective. Because as working with these different healers, medicine peoples around that I've worked with is that they don't look at it from a psychoanalysis way. Because we're native, there are certain things that mean other things. So then if we see certain animals or different things within our dreams, they mean different things. So of course, for instance, let's say you've seen an animal giving birth to a baby, but when that baby came out it was full grown and the parent, in a sense, that was giving birth died. It doesn't mean what other cultures may represent that to mean, but it can also represent a rebirth. They're giving birth to themselves, because they've changed the way that they are in their life.

OK, so remembering from a cultural point-of-view, not all dreams are dreams. Within our culture, I know that I spoke to many people around the time of 9/11. And many of these people were having dreams of planes falling out of the sky, landing in their yards, around the area. But sometimes these dreams in them-- because we're looking at, in a sense, visions—there are visions within dreams. They're are visions even when people are awake.

Now these may happen in dreams. There are also those who may have visions while they're awake. So they suddenly find themselves looking at something that is coming up soon, or sometimes they may even see the path. So sometimes also these dreams may give a

message of how they can change their life, what may be helpful within their life to be able to help them change so that they can better themselves. OK, so I guess there's a-- oh, OK. With assisting clients is understanding the culture of the client or patient is important. Knowing the culture and the deeper cultural teachings is important. But we also need to remember that our clients or patients may not always come from a cultural perspective. Those that prefer traditional practices might be more willing. We should not expect all natives to go along with the traditional practices or cultural practices within treatment or within their help.

There is a matrix model that was utilized for methamphetamine and marijuana, and that came from the friendship house in San Francisco. In the matrix model, there's also an adaptation for natives. They are also having some promise within utilizing that for synthetic cannabinoids. That consist of motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral treatment, involvement in mutual self-help groups.

So remember also to gather information from the tribe itself. There might be medicine people, healers, elders who may be able to help with that. So this is where this comes in is that remember to utilize what is in your-- what is in your community. There might be more assistance there that might be helpful. OK, at this point, are there any questions?

MAUREEN:

Yes. Sean, we do have a question from one of the-- one of the attendees, from Robin is asking what is the correct approach for someone seeking a fast, and do the approached differ between tribes and medicine people?

SEAN BEAR I:

They do. They do vary. Like in the plains, they may sit, of course, out in the middle. It can get very hot. They utilize pretty much the hottest month of the year, but they also do that-- a fast is also within the sun dances. Depending upon which tribe you go to, it may be different. There are those who will fast in the woods. There are other teachings where some can fast in their own home. Basically, they stay away from all people. There are also those who can fast, in a sense, by using water in the wintertime. They break ice and they jump in the water, but remember to be safe with that.

I mean, a lot of times what they did was to cut a hole close to the shore where they could definitely stand up, and they dipped themselves in the water like four times, but the last time they would stay under as long as possible. Depending upon where you are, depending upon the customs of the tribes, of those medicine peoples, sometimes taking them tobacco and asking about that would be pretty respectful and correct. Later on, you may have to bring like a gift or something.

Normally, what happens is when you approach medicine people, you may give them tobacco and maybe a gift, a blanket or something like that. That's usually more culturally accepted. Does that answer your question?

MAUREEN:

We'll see if Robin has a follow up question. Another question that's come up, Sean, is what is the feeling in tribal communities about use of the FDA approved medication either for opioid use disorders or for alcohol use disorders.

SEAN BEAR I:

That can be a little difficult. I mean, not all tribal peoples may want to use medication-assisted therapy, but I know there are those who do. I think it depends on how it is helping people. From my point-of-view and working with those medicine men I have in the past is that they utilize-- they actually like people to utilize what the doctor says, because that is coming from a utilize-- they actually like people to utilize what the doctor says, because that is coming from a doctor.

They may have herbal supplements they can use, but many of them will say take what the doctor says and take what I do. If this is going to help you, this medication or medicine I'm going to give you, this herb is going to help you, let the doctor change the way that they're going to do it. That is-- some of them may say that's not up to me to be able to make that decision for the doctor. Any more questions?

MAUREEN:

Yeah. Thanks, Sean. Here's another question. This is from David. From a Native American approach, how is trauma addressed?

SEAN BEAR I:

OK, we will-- we'll do some follow up on. And we have a lot of folks writing in to say thank you, Sean, for the presentation. And I think that's the end of our questions.

SEAN BEAR I:

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

MAUREEN:

Thank you, Sean, and again for everyone who attended today, the webinar was recorded and will be up on the Great Lakes ATTC website within a couple of weeks along with a copy of Sean's PowerPoint. Thanks Veronica.