



Response to the Article by Tiako Et Al, “Recidivism Is the Leading Cause of Death Among Intravenous Drug Users Who Underwent Cardiac Surgery for Infective Endocarditis”

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To the Editors,

In response to the recently published article by Tiako et al, “Recidivism Is the Leading Cause of Death Among Intravenous Drug Users Who Underwent Cardiac Surgery for Infective Endocarditis,” we strongly oppose the use of the word “recidivism” to characterize the population of patients who continue to use intravenous drugs after valve surgery for endocarditis. This term, which suggests a criminal reoffense, perpetuates the mischaracterization of people who use intravenous drugs as criminals. We encourage destigmatization of this population through the use of terms that acknowledge that addiction is a chronic disease and a treatable medical condition rather than a moral failing. Furthermore, the authors state that the leading cause of death in IVDU patients is recidivism whereas that of non-IVDU patients was related to chronic conditions. This fails to recognize that addiction is a chronic condition, similar to the other conditions discussed in the paper (eg, cardiopulmonary disease, kidney disease) with rates of medication adherence and relapse similar to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, and hypertension.¹ As we know that negative attitudes of health professionals toward patients with substance abuse disorders can contribute to suboptimal care,² we encourage our colleagues to use language that is not condemning. In addition, labeling patients as recidivists not only inappropriately blames patients for manifestations of their chronic disease, but also precludes physicians from taking responsibility for

Central Message

This is a letter to the editor responding to language used in a recent publication.

long-term disease management. Given lack of access to medication-assisted treatment nationwide,³ it’s certainly possible that what Tiako et al labeled as recidivism could more accurately be called undertreated opioid use disorder.

Regards,
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