



Taking the Escalator: Evidence-Based Theoretical Basis

Throughout this country, many substance use programs continue to base their treatment methodology and approach on 12 Step philosophy as the primary focus of treatment. Although 12 Step programs have traditionally been an essential aspect of recovery for many individuals, many changes in the field of addiction and mental health treatment have necessitated the implementation of other evidence-based approaches to the treatment of substance use disorders. For example, the opioid epidemic taking place throughout the country for over the past decade has spawned an increased awareness for the use of Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for Opioid and other Substance Use Disorders. An increased research-based recognition of the need for integrated approaches for the treatment of co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders in treatment has also shifted the paradigm of addiction treatment. Adaptation of Harm Reduction strategies is also a key aspect of modern substance use treatment as abstinence-based methods also tend to heighten resistance in many clients who enter substance use treatment while still ambivalent about their goals, especially early in treatment. Therefore, an increased need for motivational interventions based on Motivational Interviewing for engaging ambivalent clients has also been part of the shift away from traditional “experientially-based” methods such as 12 Step models. Finally, skill building models that are effective for both substance use recovery as well as for mental health issues common in substance use treatment such as Cognitive Behavioral interventions are also a much-needed aspect of integrated care for co-occurring disorders. Adolescents in particular respond better to an eclectic array of evidence-based motivational and skill building strategies as opposed to 12 Step models because of the inherently lower levels of insight and motivation often experienced by young people in substance use treatment. Finally, the Stages of Change model (otherwise known as the Transtheoretical Model) encourages clinicians to adapt their interventions accordingly based on clients’ insight and motivation levels rather than addressing substance use and mental health with a “one-size fits all” approach.

Therefore, the Taking the Escalator approach is based on an integrated array of existing evidence-based treatment approaches. These evidence-based methodologies that make up the Taking the Escalator approach include:

The Stages of Change Model [Transtheoretical Model] – (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross) – This model is focused on matching and adjusting clinical interventions directly with client changing motivation and insight levels in treatment

Motivational Interviewing – (Miller and Rollnick) – This approach directs clinicians to utilize non-judgmental empathy, reflective listening and other non-confrontational interventions to increase intrinsic motivation for change and to decrease ambivalence

Integrated Treatment for Co-Occurring Disorders (SAMHSA) - Countless research studies have proven that treating mental health and substance use simultaneously in an integrated manner is much more effective than trying to address one issue at a time or through parallel care with multiple provider agencies

Harm Reduction – Although abstinence is still the long term goal in many substance use treatment programs, especially when working with children and adolescents, still the adaptation of Harm Reduction strategies such as “starting where the client is” and accepting incremental change allows for a greater flexibility in substance use treatment settings. In abstinence-only programming, clients who are making an effort but still struggling to change are often discharged prematurely, whereas implementing some aspects of Harm Reduction allows for some adaptability in treatment planning for clients who are struggling with the concept of complete sobriety. Also, Harm Reduction allows for the acceptance of **Medication Assisted Treatment for Substance Use Disorders** in treatment settings which in itself is another evidence-based approach to substance use treatment

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Interventions have been proven to be evidence-based for decades as CBT is often an essential aspect of providing clients with relapse prevention skills as well as targeted coping skills for co-occurring mental health disorders such as anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, other mood disorders, ADHD and many other mental health and behavioral conditions that often impact treatment outcomes.



Taking the Escalator has been an ongoing accepted treatment approach as evidenced by its inclusion in the yearly continuing education curriculum at both the Rutgers School of Alcohol and Substance Use Studies as well as Monmouth University Continuing Education Program for Social Workers since 2013. In addition, Taking the Escalator was accepted in the New Jersey state curriculum for recertification credits for Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor (LCADC) training for New Jersey state licensed treatment providers. Taking the Escalator courses have been instructed throughout the state of New Jersey for hundreds of licensed professionals seeking recertification in multiple counties across the entire state.

Taking the Escalator: About the Author – Kenneth Pecoraro LCSW, LCADC, CCS – Kenneth Pecoraro, LCSW, LCADC, CCS has been providing substance abuse and mental health treatment, training and education for over 20 years using a motivational, skill-building and strength-based, client-centered approach. He has specialized with helping individuals who find the concept of change to be extremely challenging. His primary focus has been to help individuals who are resistant to traditional approaches gain the tools needed for increasing insight and motivation for positive change and recovery. This approach explains, outlines and promotes a modern yet easy to understand paradigm for today's often complex world of substance abuse and co-occurring mental health issues by using an array of accepted evidence-based treatment approaches. Mr. Pecoraro has been the Director of Addiction Services at CPC Behavioral Healthcare, a dually licensed, fully integrated mental health and substance use treatment facility that has been in existence in New Jersey since 1960. Mr. Pecoraro has written/cowritten and has been awarded multiple SAMHSA substance use treatment grants as the grant writer at CPC as well as even more other state and county grant awards to fund substance use and mental health care at CPC Behavioral Healthcare since 2001.

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