

2026 Working with Addictions Summit Sessions



Day 1 | Saturday March 28

SESSION 1

Rethinking Resistance: Motivational Interviewing Strategies for Strengthening Client Engagement

🕒 9am - 10am (EDT)



Dr. Edward Wahesh

This session reframes the concept of client “resistance” through a Motivational Interviewing (MI) lens by highlighting the distinction between client statements that favor the status quo and moments of relational discord. Participants will learn how to recognize each, avoid inadvertently reinforcing language that maintains ambivalence, and respond to discord in ways that reduce defensiveness, rebuild collaboration, and deepen rapport. Practical MI-informed strategies, including focusing, emphasizing autonomy, and using skillful reflections, will be described to help clinicians strengthen client engagement and support movement toward change in addiction treatment settings. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Wahesh.

SESSION 2

Advancing Equity in SUD Care: Mistrust, Measurement, and Structural Solutions

🕒 10:30am – 11:30am (EDT)



Corrie Vilsaint

A growing evidence base supports the use of measurement-based care and recovery vital signs in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment. An urgent challenge, however, is the persistence – and widening – of health disparities. In the general population, Black and Latinx people are approximately half as likely to remit compared to their White counterparts, and while rates of fatal drug poisonings have declined among White Americans, they have increased among other racial and ethnic groups. This session examines how healthcare systems have historically contributed to medical mistrust among minoritized communities, including people with SUD, and explores where inequities are perpetuated across the treatment and recovery continuum. Participants will learn how advances in measurement-based care and recovery vital signs can be applied more equitably, and how structural competencies can be used to identify and dismantle systemic drivers of unequal outcomes. Emphasis is placed on community-based, structurally informed approaches that reduce the risk of SUD recurrence beyond standard care practices. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Vilsaint.



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SESSION 3

Myths and Facts About Marijuana: What Therapists Need to Know

🕒 12:30pm – 1:30pm (EDT)



Dr. Mel Pohl

In this presentation, Dr. Mel Pohl critically examines claims surrounding the medical use of marijuana, highlighting evidence suggesting that its therapeutic benefits remain limited and unproven. The session explores the commercialization and medicalization of marijuana, including its historical trajectory, financial drivers, public messaging, and common misrepresentations related to safety, legality, and tax revenues. Dr. Pohl reviews emerging data on the health risks associated with modern high-potency THC products, including toxicity, concentrates such as dabs and wax, and effects on multiple organ systems. Particular attention is given to adolescents as the most vulnerable population, with discussion of impacts on brain development, motivation, cognition, IQ, driving safety, and long-term outcomes. Overall, the session equips participants with a data-driven framework to critically evaluate contemporary narratives about marijuana safety and medical use. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Pohl.

SESSION 4

Harm Reduction versus Abstinence-Based in Treatment: What's a Therapist To Do?

🕒 2pm - 3pm (EDT)



Dr. Malcolm Horn

This session will prove a brief overview of the Harm Reduction concepts and how they apply in substance use/addiction treatment programs. This session will focus on how providers can shift from the traditional abstinence-based models and incorporate harm-reduction concepts and practices to their therapy sessions. A brief overview of the ASAM (American Society of Addictive Medicine) continuum of care will be provided; how harm-reduction fits into the overall recovery model will be shared. This session will provide real-life examples and tips on how a treatment provider can shift to a more person-centered, holistic, and harm-reduction focused program while still providing quality substance use/addiction care. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Horn.



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SESSION 5

The Darker Side of Psychedelics and Psychedelic-Assisted Therapy

🕒 3:30pm – 4:30pm (EDT)



Dr. Kevin Alderson

There is rapidly escalating hype surrounding psychedelic-assisted therapy (PAT), but it is vital to approach this trend with caution. While some preliminary studies point to the potential of PAT, the results are inconsistent and often short-lived. The methodological flaws in many of these studies cast doubt on their validity and reliability, and promoting psychedelics as “safe” sends a potentially dangerous message to society. With PAT remaining illegal in most jurisdictions, practitioners face serious legal risks. Ignoring the darker side of psychedelics and PAT not only puts individuals at risk but could also have lasting negative impacts on our communities. This session will critically examine these issues to offer a truly balanced perspective. Nevertheless, attendees will also get a firsthand glimpse into the visual and cognitive effects of psychedelics through an immersive audiovisual journey—so you can understand both the allure and the risks for yourself. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Alderson.

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Day 2 | Sunday March 29

SESSION 1

🕒 9am - 10am (EDT)

Five Ways to Wreck Your Career: The Ethics of Success, Struggle, and Self-Care for Helping Professionals



Terrence D. Walton

Addiction, mental health, and other helping professionals are called to serve others with integrity, compassion, and competence. Yet, the very nature of this work can lead to burnout, ethical lapses, and professional impairment – often without warning. This engaging and thought-provoking session explores five common pitfalls that can derail a career in addiction services. Participants will examine the ethical foundations of professional self-care, the qualities that foster job satisfaction and success, and the warning signs of burnout and impairment. Drawing from the NAADAC, ACA, and NASW Codes of Ethics, this session will emphasize that taking care of oneself is not just a personal responsibility – it is an ethical imperative. Through real-world examples, interactive exercises, and practical strategies, attendees will leave with a renewed commitment to their own well-being and professional excellence. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Terrence.

SESSION 2

🕒 10:30am – 11:30am (EDT)

Ongoing and Emerging Ethical Issues in SUD and Mental Health Treatment



Kevin Doyle

This presentation will identify and explore 3-5 current and emerging ethical issues of importance to those who work with individuals with substance use, mental health, and co-occurring disorders, and provide relevant tools for resolving ethical challenges. Topics to be covered will include informed consent, emerging ethical implications of artificial intelligence (AI), and the challenges of navigating dual/multiple relationships. Participants will explore problem-solving techniques to resolve ethical challenges, including the use of ethical decision-making models. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Kevin Doyle.



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SESSION 3

No Forgiveness, No Recovery: Know Forgiveness, Know Recovery

🕒 12:30pm – 1:30pm (EDT)



Dr. W. Bryce Hagedorn

Emotional wounds commonly arise from experiences such as betrayal, abuse, neglect, and chronic invalidation. When left unaddressed, these wounds often give rise to grievances toward self and others, shaping patterns of blame, shame, and resentment. Clients frequently attempt to manage this unresolved emotional pain through maladaptive coping mechanisms, including addictive disorders, self-injurious behaviors, and intimate partner violence, which ultimately deepen isolation and harm. This session examines the most common sources of emotional wounding, how grievances are formed and maintained, and the role maladaptive coping plays in emotional regulation. Participants will also learn practical strategies to assess and support self- and other-forgiveness as an active therapeutic process, highlighting its importance in interrupting self-destructive patterns and supporting sustainable recovery. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Hagedorn.

SESSION 4

Centering Dignity: The Transformational Power of Harm Reduction Therapy

🕒 2pm – 3pm (EDT)



Dr. Andrew Tatarsky

Traditional addiction treatment has typically required a commitment to abstinence as a condition for care with abstinence viewed as the primary measure of success. This abstinence-only model risks denying the dignity of people who struggle with substances and is largely responsible for the field's failure to help many individuals struggling with substance use issues. But what happens when therapy begins with respect, radical acceptance, and empathy instead of rigid conditions? This presentation introduces Andrew Tatarsky's Integrative Harm Reduction Psychotherapy (IHRP), a therapeutic approach that centers the client's dignity and demonstrates how this shift can radically improve treatment for this underserved population.

Participants will be introduced to the core principles of harm reduction as a therapeutic framework that honors individual dignity and fosters safety, trust and healing. Attendees will learn the nine therapeutic tasks of IHRP and practical tools for applying a client-centered approach to engagement, assessment, emotional regulation, working with ambivalence and supporting positive behavior change. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Tatarsky.



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SESSION 5

Quitting is Just the Beginning: The Importance of Relapse Prevention Counseling

🕒 3:30pm – 4:30pm (EDT)



Amanda Giordano

Cessation of drugs of abuse is just the beginning of the recovery process for clients. Counselors must be prepared to support clients through the stages of recovery by providing relapse prevention counseling. Relapse is always a threat to behavior change and counselors must be equipped to help clients identify triggers and high-risk situations and develop effective coping strategies. In this session, attendees will learn about recovery as a developmental process and three different models of relapse prevention counseling (i.e., Relapse Prevention Model, Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention, CENAPS Model). Attendees also will gain information about various sources of support for clients in recovery including peer support groups. The session concludes with a short Q&A segment with Dr. Giordano.

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