

IHI Open School Recover Hope Campaign

Campaign Action Area #4: Reform University Curricula

The Urgent Challenge: Health care professional education perpetuates misconceptions of substance use disorders

Misconceptions about the nature of substance use disorders are widespread among the public and in health care professions. A 2008 survey by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) found that about one-third of the United States population believes that quitting a substance is a matter of willpower.¹ In reality, research shows that addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease and that short-term detoxification is typically ineffective treatment.²

Health professional training programs teach basic information on substance use disorders, but coverage of this topic is usually brief and does not include evidence-based education on the neuroscience of addiction, the role of genetics and epigenetics, the social determinants of substance use disorders, nor comprehensive, hands-on training on the latest approaches to prevention, diagnosis, and treatment.³ This leaves future health providers ill-equipped to address the complexities of substance use disorders in their patients.

Implicit bias and structural barriers also prevent equitable access to high-quality substance use disorder treatment along racial, gender, socioeconomic, and other lines. University curricula must equip students and trainees to prevent and treat substance use disorders across all populations to reduce disparities in outcomes.

Our Response: Reform University Curricula

The next generation of health care providers must learn to see substance use disorders for what they are – preventable, treatable, chronic, potentially fatal, relapsing diseases of the nervous system – and address them as they would any other chronic disease. Students and residents can advocate for the inclusion of comprehensive education on the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders and pain management alternatives into university curricula and organizational training programs to take a long-term, systems-level approach to this crisis.

Your Choice Now: Lead a Project

Explore this list of project ideas as a starting point for leading change. It is by no means comprehensive; there are many ways to promote training programs in substance use disorders and change university curricula. The important thing is to start and improve as you go!

For over a decade, IHI Open School students have successfully partnered with classmates, faculty, and university administrators to integrate quality and safety training into curriculum. Approaches include advocating that academic credit be granted for IHI Open School courses, establishing mandatory introductory training programs in quality and safety for incoming students, incorporating quality and safety content into existing coursework, and creating elective rotations or project-based training opportunities. Campaign projects can be modeled off similar efforts, leveraging existing educational resources on substance use disorders.

Substance Use Disorder Curriculum

Modules: Explore online courses like the SCOPE of Pain modules on opioid prescribing, which are designed to be integrated into courses not exclusively focused on substance use disorders. Invite your classmates to take the courses and faculty advisors to evaluate their potential as additions to existing curricula.

University of Minnesota: Formed in 2016, The University of Minnesota Center for Addiction Neuroscience coordinates efforts of clinical and basic science researchers to apply their discoveries to patient care and public health. With the support and leadership of students, the university secured large grants to make this research possible, leading to development of a graduate program in Addiction Neuroscience.

Ways to Get Started

1. **Review the IHI Open School Curriculum Integration guide** for tips on how IHI Open School Chapters have integrated quality and safety education into university curriculum
2. **Plan a Chapter Meeting** to talk with classmates about the gaps in your education on substance use disorders
3. **Meet with faculty and administrators** to share your vision for a comprehensive curriculum on prevention and treatment of substance use disorders
4. **Plan an event** to raise awareness among students and faculty of the need for curriculum on substance use disorders, and mobilize student turnout to demonstrate that this is a priority

Leverage Open School resources to strengthen your project:

- **Visit the Chapter Map** to find and connect with an IHI Open School Chapter near you
- **Download the Chapter Leader Toolkit** to start a Chapter at your university or organization
- **Take our quality improvement courses** to learn to design a strong improvement project
- **Join the Leadership & Organizing for Change course** in March 2019 to learn to launch your campaign project and meaningfully engage others in your vision for change
- **Get inspired by the IHI Open School blog**, which highlights Chapters' work to engage their peers in health improvement efforts
- **Explore videos and activities** to learn concepts and tools to strengthen your projects
- **Email openschool@ihi.org** to receive coaching on how to get started

www.IHI.org/OpenSchool

References:

1. National Survey on Drug Use and Health 2008. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive. 2008. <https://www.datafiles.samhsa.gov/study-dataset/national-survey-drug-use-and-health-2008-nsduh-2008-ds0001-nid13764>
2. Leshner A. Addiction is a brain disease, and it matters. *Science*. 1997(278:5335);45-47. <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/278/5335/45>
3. Darnall B, Carr D, Schatman M. Pain psychology and the biopsychosocial model of pain treatment: ethical imperatives and social responsibility. *Pain Med*. 2017(18:8);1413-1415. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5914334/>