

## Humanizing Substance Use

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### A. Abstract

Substance use has long been stigmatized by society and by the healthcare industry, resulting in a lot of misplaced blame. The blame game works like this: the lack of accountability underscores a lack of ownership, perpetuating a lack of motivation, fostering the lack of action. Consequently, the healthcare industry is unprepared to meet the substance use needs of our patient populations.

Education is needed to address the stigma among the full healthcare workforce to enhance motivation to recognize opportunities to address substance use with patients, as part of usual care, regardless of the clinical setting they present to for care (Kapoor et al., 2018). By developing educational offerings and pathways focused on humanism, and evidence-based practices, the goal is to engage future physicians and empower them to be invested and committed to address the full spectrum of substance use across all healthcare settings. To be successful, we need to provide education that extends beyond the science of substance use and addiction that translates into humanistic care. This is a virtual, asynchronous activity designed to be completed in one 75- minute session.

As a result of this curriculum, medical students will be able to:

1. Identify daily challenges faced by individuals with substance use
2. Describe biases that may impact those suffering from substance use issues
3. Explore how community-level stigma influences individual journeys
4. Explore the nuances of the journey to recovery and well-being
5. Apply lessons learned to provide patient-centric humanistic care for individuals struggling with substance use issues.

### B. Introduction/ Rationale

In the United States, substance use is an ongoing public health issue, where 60% of the population reports using tobacco, alcohol, or drugs in the past month, and 20.3 million Americans have had a substance use disorder (SUD) in the past year (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2019). Alcohol use is associated with an increased risk of hypertension, diabetes, and other chronic medical conditions addressed in routine medical care, yet only 1 in 6 patients discuss alcohol use with their healthcare provider (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014; Husain et al., 2014; McDonald, 1980; Saunders et al., 1981). The disparity between the needs

of patients related to substance use and the capability of the healthcare industry to address them is a result of a lack of education. The average physician receives only four hours of education on substance use in medical school, and the U.S. only has 2,000 physicians trained in addiction psychiatry and 3,500 trained in addiction medicine, making it challenging for patients to find the care they need. A survey of practicing clinicians within our organization demonstrated a high interest level but low knowledge level around safe opioid prescribing and treating opioid addiction (Kirane et al., 2019).

### C. Curriculum Design

This is intended to be a virtual, asynchronous activity designed to be completed in one 75-minute session. Incoming first-year medical students may complete this curricular activity as part of orientation, after they complete Basic Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-B) training. Based on past student-reported experiences, EMT rotations may fuel stigma toward patients presenting with substance use related concerns.

Infusing compassionate approaches early on in a medical student's educational tenure will inspire learners to serve as role models and agents of change, throughout their clinical rotations, to manifest a humanistic approach in all disciplines they interact with. This curricular activity aims to provide a multiple perspectives in the journey to reframe substance use disorder as chronic healthcare issue, similar to hypertension, diabetes. The curricular content will utilize publicly available videos on YouTube to support a reflective journey for the intended learners.

#### **Learning Experiences, Instruction and Assessment:**

The YouTube Reflection Journey is described in the Student Guide (**Appendix C**) as a peek into the life of some of our future patients. Medical students are naturally curious and want to further expose themselves to stories that will help them become better physicians. Many medical students don't get the opportunity to see and hear the struggles of those impacted by substance use firsthand prior to clinical rotations, and thus this opportunity is truly a special and accessible experience. It is designed to be virtual, open to all, and requires very few resources in order to successfully implement. The reality is that there is no six degrees of separation with this topic, so encouraging participation is a lesser barrier than with other topics.

Due to ongoing social distancing restrictions, there is less opportunity for medical students to shadow clinical team members on site. This reality impacts the ability for learners to interact with populations struggling with substance use, and to witness firsthand what compassionate approaches look like in addressing this chronic healthcare condition. Therefore, this fully virtual, innovative asynchronous activity, is designed to provide unique perspectives to empower learners to view substance use through the lens of compassion, partnership, and empathy.

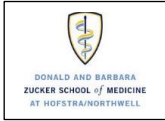
**Appendix A** consists of the YouTube Journey Video Reflection Worksheet, which will serve to guide this activity. The intended take-away from the video reflection exercise is to have students appreciate the journey of those suffering from substance use issues informed by first-person perspectives. The goal of the videos is to shed light on various time points while patients are actively navigating their addiction prior to treatment, to when they have completed their goals for recovery. This exercise will also highlight the struggles faced with members of their communities, family, and law enforcement. Additionally, the videos will allow learners to identify progress being made to shift attitudes yielding environments more humanistic to approaching substance use disorder and addiction as a chronic disease, as opposed to a moral failing.

The Student Guide (see **Appendix C**) will be provided to students via email, along with the planned content for the Video Reflection Journey. The activity “book ends” an Opening Reflection and a Closing Reflection, with brief videos and short-answer questions in between. The videos will cover domains including: a) Personal Perspectives; b) Community Influence; c) Law Enforcement; and d) Interdisciplinary Healthcare. The responses to the short-answer questions will help fuel learner content for their Closing Reflection. The Student Guide will include Goals and Learning Objectives, as well as the link to the pre-session survey in REDCap.

REDCap allows longitudinal data to be linked for individual participants, while maintaining complete anonymity of responses. Sending the links through the platform allows the faculty to see who has completed the surveys and activity, but will not allow them to see whose responses are whose. In anticipation of curriculum change funding, we have built a draft version of the learning module into REDCap. By using the REDCap platform, students can anonymously complete the pre-survey, video activities, and post-survey. The curricular team will be able to link the data by anonymous individual in order to evaluate the activity as a whole. By maintaining anonymity, the goal is to encourage students to share honestly, and feel comfortable providing detailed responses about an uncomfortable subject.

The goal for this session is to evaluate the extent to which the curricular content achieves learning objectives in aggregate form, not to evaluate students individually. While individual student knowledge, attitudes, and perceived skills are important, this curricular activity is designed to shift attitudes and drive a humanistic approach to addressing substance use as part of usual care. To achieve this, we will administer anonymous mix methods, quantitative and qualitative, pre-and post-surveys (**Appendix B**) with 10 Likert-scale questions mapped to the learning objectives. Statistically significant changes in each of the 10 indicators ( $p < 0.05$ ) from pre- to post-survey (measured using paired-samples t-test) will be considered an acceptable change in attitudes, knowledge, and perceived skills for the incoming first-year medical student cohort, as a group. The post-survey will include 3 open-ended questions asking for self-reported session takeaways, commitment to apply session content to professional roles, and suggestions to improve the curricular content for the subsequent academic years. Additionally, we will conduct qualitative analysis for the Opening and Closing reflections.

Anonymous pre- and post-surveys (**Appendix B**) with 10 Likert-scale questions mapped to the learning objectives to address attitudes, knowledge, and perceived skills will be administered. The survey questions will be programmed into REDCap, which allows longitudinal data to be linked for individual participants, while maintaining complete anonymity of responses. Closing reflections, coupled with the opening reflections will yield insights as well. After the session, once results have been analyzed, students will receive a report with aggregate data showing where the class stands for each pre/post survey question. They will also receive a summary of themes pulled from the Video Reflection Worksheet, in order to further learn from their classmates and see the diverse ways in which the information was interpreted.



## Appendix A

# VIDEO REFLECTION WORKSHEET



### A New Life: A Look into the Journey to Recovery and Well-Being

This questionnaire, along with the accompanying series of videos, aims to give a brief view into the journey of individuals dealing with substance use disorders towards recovery and wellbeing. In these trying times of COVID-19, many medical students lack the opportunity to interact with this patient population, and this virtual experience aims to aid in filling in the gap many medical students have at this time.

**Directions:** This worksheet will be bookended by reflections designed to stimulate thought before and after your experience watching the videos. The short-answer prompts associated with each video are designed to help create ideas that can be used with the final reflection. We hope you finish this series of videos with a better idea of not only what substance use patients may go through, but also how the community around them has been, and how it is evolving.

### Opening Reflection

- a. First, let's start off with a brief reflection. Suggested prompts: (please indicate which prompt(s) you have written about)
  - i. When you hear "substance use," share what emotions and thoughts come to mind.
  - ii. How would you define addiction?
  - iii. Reflect on what comes to mind when you think about substance use disorders. Utilize experiences you may have had with substance use patient to help you reflect.

### Personal Perspective

- b. Video 1: [A day in the life of...\(Click Here\)](#)
  - i. Explain your emotional reaction to Jason's daily routine.
  - ii. Describe challenges Jason may face on a daily basis because of his substance use.
  - iii. How may Jason's environment have a significant effect on his ability to reach recovery?
  - iv. Describe your emotions if Jason was one of your own patients.
  - v. How else may have Jason's story been portrayed by the broadcast?

### Community Influence

- c. Video 2: [Opioid Addiction Dearborn's Muslim Community \(click here\)](#)
  - i. What role does stigma play in the daily struggles of substance use patients, as portrayed in the video?
  - ii. In the video, how does stigma impact the ability of patients to seek care?
  - iii. What role does a support system play in the journey towards recovery?
  - iv. In what ways may a physician support a patient when the patient lacks a support system?

### Law Enforcement:

- d. Videos 3 & 4: [Jeffersontown police department changes... \(click Here\)](#)  
& [Rethinking How We Police Addiction \(Click Here\)](#)

- i. What role has law enforcement played in the life of substance use patients in the past?
- ii. How may a lack of support from law enforcement impact the path towards recovery for substance use patients?
- iii. In what ways do you believe that the change in attitudes and actions by law enforcement (exemplified in these videos) may help substance use patients towards recovery?

### **Interdisciplinary Healthcare:**

e. Video 5: [Beating Opioid Addiction \(Click Here\)](#)  
& [Humanizing Substance Use \(Click Here\)](#)

- i. How does Joy's story differ from Hassan's story in Video 2?
- ii. How can an interdisciplinary care team successfully improve outcomes for those suffering from substance use issues?
- iii. How did you feel seeing how Joy found success and fulfillment, in addition to a way to give back to others, despite her past issues with substance use?

### **Closing Reflection**

f. Lastly, let's end with a brief reflection. Suggested prompts: (please indicate which prompt(s) you have written about)

- i. When you hear "substance use," share what emotions and thoughts come to mind
- ii. Explain how the videos have impacted your thoughts about patients suffering from substance use disorder
- iii. Describe changes in the modern healthcare system that would improve experiences for those suffering from substance use issues.

## Appendix B-1 Pre-Survey

The following survey questions are meant to assess your knowledge and attitudes about substance use prior to an educational activity. Your answers will help to us to evaluate and improve the educational process. This survey is anonymous, so please answer as honestly as possible. For the purposes of this survey, substances refer to both alcohol AND drugs. We greatly appreciate the time you are taking to respond. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please email us at [sbirtinfo@northwell.edu](mailto:sbirtinfo@northwell.edu).

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>I have a good understanding of substance use and misuse</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I want to learn effective methods for directly addressing my patients' risky or harmful substance use</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Substance use should be addressed as part of usual clinical care</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I am confident in my ability to have a non-judgmental conversation about substance use</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Substance use disorder is a chronic medical condition</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>I feel compassionate towards individuals with a substance use disorder</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Substance use treatment programs are available in my community</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Substance use treatment programs are effective for patients with substance use disorders</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>My interaction with a patient can make a difference regarding their use of substances</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Recovery from addiction is possible</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

## Appendix B-2 Post-Survey

The following survey questions are meant to assess your knowledge and attitudes about substance use after an educational activity. Your answers will help to us to evaluate and improve the educational process. This survey is anonymous, so please answer as honestly as possible. For the purposes of this survey, substances refer to both alcohol AND drugs. We greatly appreciate the time you are taking to respond. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please email us at [sbirtinfo@northwell.edu](mailto:sbirtinfo@northwell.edu).

**What are the most important concepts you learned from this activity?**

**What is realistic to focus on and apply to your current/future role?**

**What comments/suggestions do you have to improve the quality and efficiency of this educational activity?**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a good understanding of substance use and misuse	1	2	3	4	5
I want to learn effective methods for directly addressing my patients' risky or harmful substance use	1	2	3	4	5
Substance use should be addressed as part of usual clinical care	1	2	3	4	5
I am confident in my ability to have a non-judgmental conversation about substance use	1	2	3	4	5
Substance use disorder is a chronic medical condition	1	2	3	4	5
I feel compassionate towards individuals with a substance use disorder	1	2	3	4	5
Substance use treatment programs are available in my community	1	2	3	4	5
Substance use treatment programs are effective for patients with substance use disorders	1	2	3	4	5
My interaction with a patient can make a difference regarding their use of substances	1	2	3	4	5
Recovery from addiction is possible	1	2	3	4	5

## Appendix C

### STUDENT GUIDE

#### *Humanizing Substance Use: Student Guide*

##### **Pre-reading:**

- None

##### **Goals of Session:**

- Connect prior knowledge around substance use to the experience of individuals struggling with substance use
- View substance use from different perspectives
  1. Personal Perspective
  2. Community influence
  3. Law Enforcement
  4. Interdisciplinary Healthcare
- Understand that the journey to recovery is not a simple one, and is not a straight line
- Reflect on different perspectives to rethink how, as a medical student, you can have an impact in the lives of patients with substance use

##### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Identify daily challenges faced by individuals with substance use
2. Describe biases that may impact those suffering from substance use issues
3. Explore how community-level stigma influences individual journeys
4. Explore the nuances of the journey to recovery and well-being
5. Apply lessons learned to provide patient-centric humanistic care for individuals struggling with substance use issues

##### **Overview agenda:**

- Complete pre-survey: <https://redcap.link/youtubejourney> (5 min)
- Proceed to YouTube Reflection Journey (using Video Reflection Worksheet) (60 min)
- Proceed to post-survey. (10 min)

##### **Handouts:**

- None

##### **Take home points:**

- Individuals with substance use face stigma and challenges in the community and within healthcare settings.
- Healthcare providers have the ability to make a difference in the lives of patients with substance use.
- Recovery from addiction is possible.



## Appendix D

### REFERENCES

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