Addressing the National Opioid Crisis by Developing and Implementing Undergraduate Nursing Curricula

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Substance use disorder (SUD) is a primary, chronic and relapsing brain disease characterized by an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors. Of the 20.5 million Americans ages 12 years and older that had a SUD in 2015, 2 million of them involved a prescription pain relievers and 591,000 involved the opioid, heroin. It is well known that prescription pain relievers are the gateway to heroin. The epidemic claims more than 140 Americans daily, and approximately 800 individuals overdose weekly and succumb to opioids. In 2015 52,404 Americans died from drug overdoses and those numbers rose to 64,000 in 2016. Since the early 1990s the rate of consumption of opioid pain relievers (OPRs) in the United States has increased nearly 500% with a 900% increase in Americans seeking substance abuse treatment. Drug overdose, specifically opioid painkillers and heroin, is the leading cause of accidental death in the US, with 52,404 lethal reported drug overdoses in 2015. These surpass deaths from motor vehicles and firearms according to the Drug Enforcement Agency. In Philadelphia alone, the emergency departments are inundated with overdoses and cannot accommodate the amount of drug overdoses from heroin use. Opioid addiction is driving this epidemic, with 20,101 overdose deaths related to prescription pain relievers, and 12,990 overdose deaths related to heroin in 2015.

Women are more likely to have chronic pain, be prescribed prescription pain relievers, to be given higher doses, and use them for longer time periods than men. Women may become dependent on prescription pain relievers more quickly than men, a phenomenon called telescoping.

The United States is in a nationwide public health crisis from SUD, one that has never been seen in such vast depth and breath, affecting so many Americans, burdening economic growth, healthcare providers, health systems, families, social services, education systems.

The CDC has reported that the economic burden of this epidemic annually is estimated at $78.5 billion per year which includes the cost of healthcare, the lost of productivity, the cost of substance abuse treatment, and the cost of criminal justice involvement. Not considered is the burden on the interdisciplinary healthcare providers, the burden and impact on families, the impact on children who have become orphans, the impact on babies who have suffered neonatal abstinence syndrome and long-term intellectual, behavioral and developmental delays, the impact of sexual, physical, and intimate partner violence, the impact on parents and grandparents who are now in the role of parents of the orphaned children of the substance users.

When the department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency, additional personal and monies were available to address funding and support to work with the drug enforcement agency, the CDC, and the HHS in order to expand services. The HHS developed a five point strategy to target the opioid epidemic which includes the following: 1) improved access to prevention, treatment, and recovery support services, 2) Improved access and distribution of overdose-reversing
medications, 3) Improved research on pain, substance use disorders and addiction, 4) Improved large data collection on the opioid crisis, & 5) Expansion on funding for resources for treatment, recovery and long-term sobriety.

As a result of this national public health epidemic healthcare providers, health systems, educational systems and social services have been burdened. Thus a call for the development and implementation of educational and support programs. As a result the The Fitzpatrick College of Nursing recognized that nurses were at the forefront in the opioid crisis as first responders and saw the need to to prepare them for integration into the healthcare system.

The course, titled "The Opioid Crisis", a senior level undergraduate course, addresses. the organizing framework of the undergraduate program as well as the critical components of core nursing competencies (e.g. patient-centered care, evidence-based practice, professional values and ethics, assessment and clinical reasoning). The outline is included in the submission and details of the course can be shared in the poster or presentation.

The primary course instructors are from two separate disciplines in nursing; Maternal-Child Health and Psychiatric Mental Health. The instructors plan to incorporate guest speakers from a variety of disciplines in and outside of the university including: Women’s Studies, Medicine, Psychiatry, Psychology, Counseling, and Social Work, and Addiction Studies, and Law Enforcement.

The Fitzpatrick College of Nursing believes that healthcare systems are over-burdened with this crisis, in all areas, emergency room, the peri-operative areas, medical-surgical units, critical care areas, out-patient primary care offices, behavior health facilities to name a few. As nurses we are front line health care providers responsible for the identification, screening, and management of patients with chronic pain, and substance use disorders and as a result we at Villanova believe that we must respond to not only the national priorities that the NIH has identified, as well as the local communities. We hope that this course is a model that other nursing programs can model from and develop in order to educator their students.

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Abstract Summary:
The Opioid Epidemic, an undergraduate nursing course to assist students in the entry into the healthcare system with an overview of substance use disorder. A review of the history of the crisis, screening, assessment, management and referral as well as options for chronic pain management and trauma informed care.

Content Outline:
1. Discuss the opioid crisis in the America
2. Discuss the impact of diversities and its impact on SUD specific to opioids
3. Evaluate the historical perspectives in treatment of addiction, specifically as it relates to opioids and current treatment options
4. Examine the ethical and legal issues of SUD with the opioid crisis
5. Discuss new clinical practice guidelines for opioid prescribing and impacts on patient care
6. Analyze the relationship between mental health disorders/issues with opioid addiction
7. Discuss the Health and Human Services 5 point agenda
8. Discuss the review of the development and implementation of the course

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Author Summary: Amy McKeever is a PhD prepared nurse educator and also a certified women's health nurse practitioner who is still maintains a clinical practice. She teaches undergraduate and graduate students at Villanova University. She speaks nationally and internationally as well as publishes on issues pertaining that impact the childbearing women as well as curricular issues affecting nursing education in undergraduate and graduate nursing.