

UST Public Health Interest Group: Inspiring the Community to Address Challenges in Healthcare Access

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Overview

The Public Health Interest Group, consisting of students from the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, Dental Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Social Work, and Quinnipiac University's Physician Assistant program, addressed the emerging issues affecting public health. Through monthly student-led discussions on public health matters such as opioid usage and accessibility of care for patients with disabilities, a series of speaker events was organized to address these issues.

Background

The Urban Service Track Public Health Interest Group, a student-led and student-centered group, served as a collaborative hub for students from diverse healthcare disciplines, encompassing pharmacy, nursing, medicine, dental, and social work. Our mission was to leverage our collective expertise to ensure equitable access to healthcare for all individuals in urban communities.

This year, the group focused on topics related to disability, intersectionality, and substance abuse. Physical, cognitive, and intellectual factors underscore the importance of considering the unique challenges faced by these individuals accessing equitable quality healthcare services. Additionally, we addressed the emerging topic of opioid use disorders with a session on Narcan training.

By exploring themes such as substance use disorder and accessibility barriers faced by patients with disabilities, we aim to advocate for inclusive policies, promote education and awareness, and foster partnerships with community stakeholders to improve the health and well-being of every individual.

Methods

- The Public Health IG Met monthly from November to April over the course of the year.
- Before each meeting, an agenda outlining the planned topics of discussion was provided to each member by the group co-leads.
- Co-leads were responsible for compiling these agendas and ensuring that their contents were followed during each meeting.
- Notable activities carried out during these meetings included a narcan training to help interest group members identify an opioid overdose and how to provide help, and a guest speaker, Alex Bode, who discussed and educated interest group members how to provide better care for individuals with physical disabilities.
- All events conducted within this IG were run and led by our students.
- Member feedback concerning IG activities and internal discourse was elicited at the end of every meeting.

Objectives

- Identified barriers to access for people with disabilities within public health systems.
- Fostered partnerships with organizations to make public health services more accessible, especially as future health care providers.
- Recognized the intersectionality of disability with other social identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.
- Established training programs for healthcare professionals on the administration of Narcan and overdose response.
- Combated stigma associated with substance use disorders by promoting messages of compassion, empathy, and support for individuals seeking help.

Monthly Meetings:

Exploring Public Health

Each member or group of members presented on various topics within the umbrella term of public health. These topics included homelessness, mental health, environment, gender identity, and urbanism.



Guest Speaker

- We had the privilege of hosting guest speaker Alex Bode, a 32-year-old living with Friedreich's Ataxia. Alex shared her inspiring journey of pursuing a master's degree in social work with physical challenges, having to utilize a wheelchair and ceiling-mounted lifts.
- Alex has also established a nonprofit called "Peace, Love, and Accessibility" to advocate for accessibility awareness in the community.
- Her story shed light on the challenges people with disabilities faced and her organization further highlighted the importance of spreading awareness as future healthcare workers to make adequate care accessible to our patients.
- Alex Bode's talk described substantial changes we, as future healthcare professionals, should implement in our practice to better care for those who may have a physical or mental disability.
- This could include simple changes such as making sure to directly address the patient and respecting their decisions, regardless of their disability.
- We can also initiate institutional and systemic changes, such as increasing wheelchair accessibility in healthcare facilities or readily providing various resources including hooyer lifts.

Peace, Love Accessibility
Facebook Page:



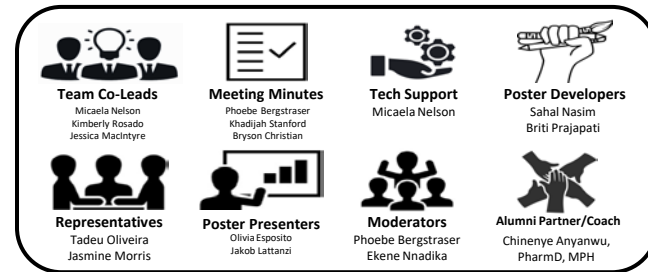
Narcan Training

We organized a Narcan training session for our January meeting, led by Suzanne Doyon, where we learned about primary intervention strategies and identifying overdose cases. Her insight into this topic has allowed us to understand the threat opiates had within our community and the necessity of evaluating dosage and patient history before prescriptions. The Narcan session also provided a basic understanding of opioids, their effects, and function, but it actively trained students to administer Narcan during encounters with opioid overdoses.



Results

Figure 1. Role delineation among Public Health IG members:



Conclusion and Future Directions

- Each event focused on educating members and fellow students of topics, such as substance use or issues pertaining to disability.
- Therefore, the defining themes to this year's events included advocacy and active participation within the community.
- Group members shared and formulated ideas in a team based environment to create realistic solutions to address barriers such as the lack of respect and autonomy experienced by many disabled patients.
- Dictate various events and activities, often favoring those that focused on initiating active change in the community.
- The Narcan training session serves as a perfect example, in which we, along with other students, were taught how to appropriately manage an opiate overdose.
- Our activities have helped us achieve our goals of gaining greater knowledge to interact with and serve various groups in healthcare.

References

Scan Here for
References:



A full list of articles, papers, and other materials cited for this project may be found using the provided QR code.

Acknowledgments

The Public Health Interest Group would like to thank the following primary poster writers: Sahal Nasim and Briti Prajapati.

The authors would also like to thank the following mentors for guidance provided in the completion of this project: Cecil Tengatenga, STM; Suzanne Doyon, MD; Alex Bode, MSW; and Shanthi Rao, MSW.