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FUTURE OF NURSING™ CAMPAIGN FOR ACTION

Integrating Social Determinants of Health into Addictions Education

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Abstract

Background: Nurses working in most settings encounter people with substance use and addictions, many of which are related to social determinants of health (SDOH). SDOH are defined as "the conditions in the environment where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age", which can "affect a wide range of health, functioning, quality of life outcomes and risks" (DHHS; WHO). Health disparities relate directly to SDOH, e.g., access to healthcare, healthy food, safe neighborhoods, good housing, education and employment opportunities, and freedom from racism and other prejudices (Brennan et al, 2008).

There are numerous examples of the associations between SDOH and substance use/addiction problems including significantly higher rates of drug mortality in areas with greater economic and family distress, higher rates of tobacco smoking among individuals with lower socioeconomic status, and lower rates of treatment completion among Blacks and Hispanics compared to Whites (Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, 2022; Monmat, 2018; Saloner & Lê Cook, 2013). Structural barriers lead to differing levels of service availability and racial/ethnic disparities in treatment initiation (Priester et al., 2016).

Objectives: To develop a healthcare provider workforce capable of addressing health equity, education about SDOH is critical (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2021; National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2016). The purpose of this study was to describe how we have integrated SDOH concepts throughout the courses in our Substance Use and Addictions Nursing (SUAN) post-baccalaureate certificate program.

Methods: Our examination of SDOH course content was guided by the social-ecological model, which considers the complexities of individual, relationship, community, and societal risk and resiliency factors (CDC, 2022).

Results: The SUAN certificate program integrated SDOH content related to addictions throughout its four courses. Examples include the impact of homelessness, socioeconomic status, health inequities, and social and structural risk and protective factors for substance use disorders. Risk and protective factors are explored over the lifespan and within special populations such as for those involved in the criminal justice system, military personnel and their families, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Emphasis is placed on fostering person-centered communication and therapeutic relationships from a perspective of cultural competence and humility that supports the innate ability and human right to autonomy. Finally, in the clinical course, students consider SDOH while engaging in immersive experiences with providers and care programs that serve individuals and communities affected by addictions.

Conclusion: Substance use and addictions have devastating health and social consequences for individuals, families and communities. By integrating SDOH into the SUAN curriculum, we are helping to develop a nursing workforce that addresses health equity, recovery, and wellness for people with substance use and related problems.