

# Initiating a Research Advisory Committee in a Substance Use Treatment Center and Launching the PURPLE Project

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RAC Participant Advisors<sup>4</sup>: Sarah Dunston-Lee, Sandy Ford, Rosalind Haines-Jones, Christina McArdle, Diana Surland, Anthony Walker, Donald Young (+4 other advisors)

## Background

Over 100,000 deaths each year are related to drug and alcohol use. Substance use and poor health outcomes have been linked to stressors related to the inability to meet social needs (e.g., food, shelter). To improve research and programming in populations with substance use disorder (SUD) and to ensure relevance to the community served, researchers from the University of Maryland Schools of Nursing<sup>1</sup>, Medicine<sup>1</sup>, and School of Pharmacy PATIENTS<sup>3</sup> program established the Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

- The RAC includes researchers, patients and direct-service staff at the University of Maryland Medical Center Addictions Treatment Program (UMMC ATP).<sup>4</sup>
- The RAC also launched the PURPLE Project : Promoting Understanding in social needs Research Projects by Listening and Engaging to codevelop research related to addressing social needs.

## Objectives

- To establish a RAC to gather advisor insights on research to inform planning, implementation, and dissemination in substance use treatment settings
- To co-develop research proposals and provide critical feedback on programmatic/non-research projects
- To develop stakeholder-centered research around addressing social needs in healthcare and employment settings
- To evaluate RAC patient/stakeholder engagement experience

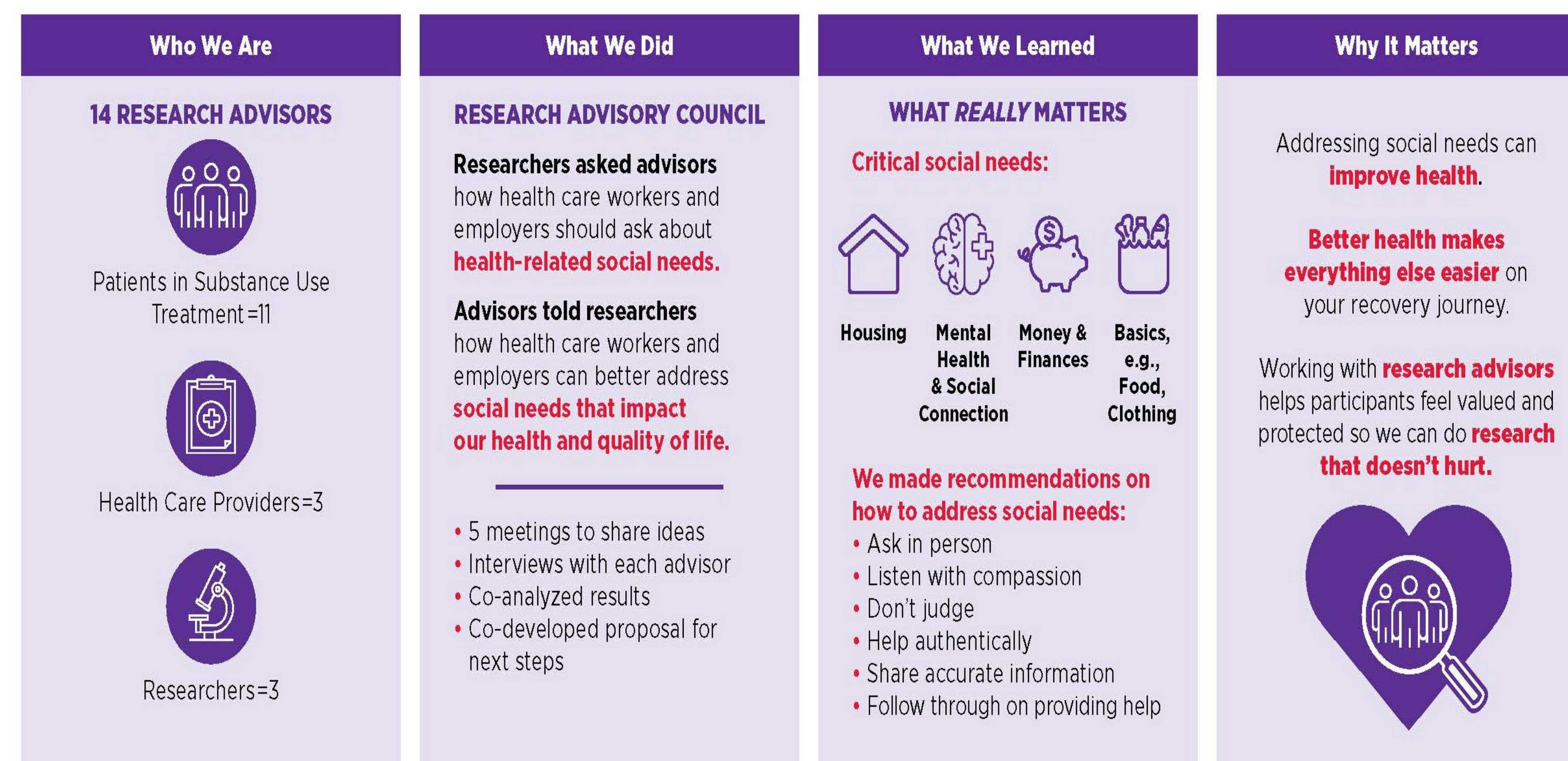
## Methods

- Recruited, installed, oriented, and trained a patient and staff research advisory committee (RAC)
- Applied the 10-Step Framework for Patient Engagement in community-engaged research (Figure 1)
- Conducted 7 research advisory meetings & thirteen 1:1 interviews during COVID19 restrictions Nov. 2021-Mar. 2023
- Completed Ways of Engaging-ENGagement ACTivity Tool (WE-ENACT) and 1:1 interviews to evaluate patient/stakeholder experience

## PURPLE: Promoting Understanding in Social Needs Research Projects by Listening and Engaging



**PROJECT GOAL:** Listen to advisors' views on addressing health-related social needs



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Figure 2. Preliminary to Research Results Establishing the PURPLE Project

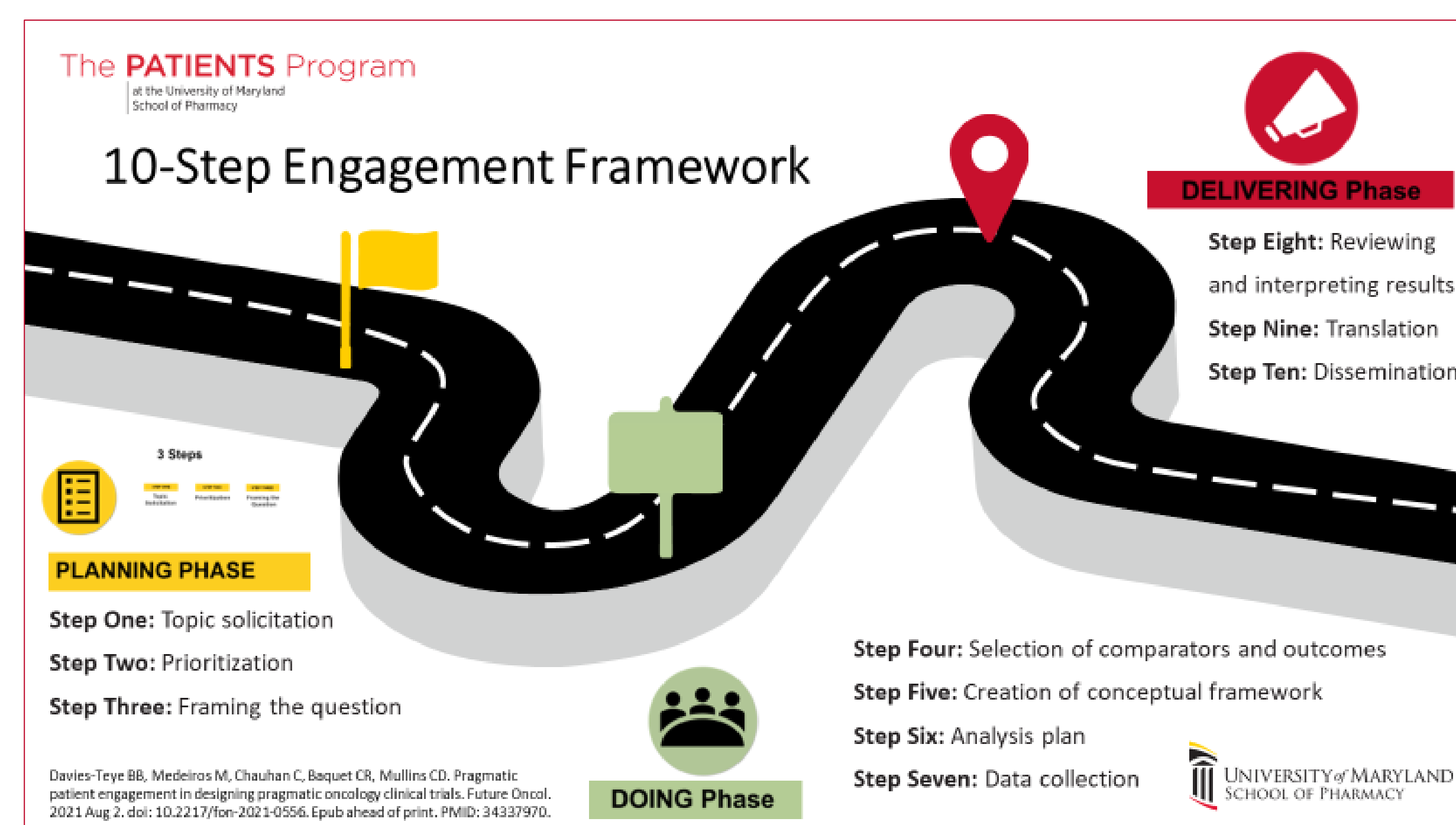


Figure 1. Roadmap for the 10-Step Framework for Continuous Patient/Stakeholder Engagement

Co-framed Research Question:

- "Can we translate evidence from self-help support groups to address housing insecurity and social connection needs, especially for persons with SUD?"
- We proposed to develop and test a pilot housing support group, co-led by persons with SUD and housing insecurity and professional experts, to address barriers to housing stability and to foster increased social connection.



Figure 3. Co-developing a Research Question with PURPLE-RAC Advisors

## Results

We successfully recruited and installed a fully functional RAC in 6 months during COVID19.

- In addition to 2-3 rotating RAC researchers, Participant Advisors are:
  - 2 staff and 11 patients: 8 women, 6 men; people who identify as Black (n=10) and white (n=4); ages from early 30s to late 60s at various stages of recovery with and without medication assisted therapy.
- RAC advisors provided feedback affecting
  - research planning and dissemination, non-research programmatic activities at UMMC ATP.
- Initiation of the PURPLE Project.
  - We prioritized strategic areas for health-related social needs research and
  - generated recommendations for improving how healthcare institutions and employers address social needs (Figure 2);
  - co-developed a research proposal (Figure 3)

## Conclusion

We pioneered and operationalized a model of collaboration and equity in patient-centered addictions and social needs research. RAC advisors provided critical input informing research and service.

- Limitations: In evaluations, RAC members were unable to distinguish advising on general research activities and PURPLE project activities. In future, we recommend establishing a smaller focused RAC for general research advising and separate advisory committees for specific research projects.
- Overall, the project was well received by RAC members and by external researchers and staff.
- RAC researchers said the most rewarding aspect was working as colleagues with our brilliant participant advisors.
- RAC participant advisors described a similar rewarding experience:

*"This work is so important. I would participate in this project even if we didn't get paid"* and

*"This is where I come to meet and be with my people. Every time, I learn something new and take it back home."*