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Spring 2020

America's Opioid Crisis: Pills, Fentanyl, and a Public Health Epidemic

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Before I started this project, I had no idea what the topic of my project was going to be. After a few Google searches and headline surfing, I decided on America's opioid crisis. As a future medical professional, I was drawn into the medical model of drug addiction and the

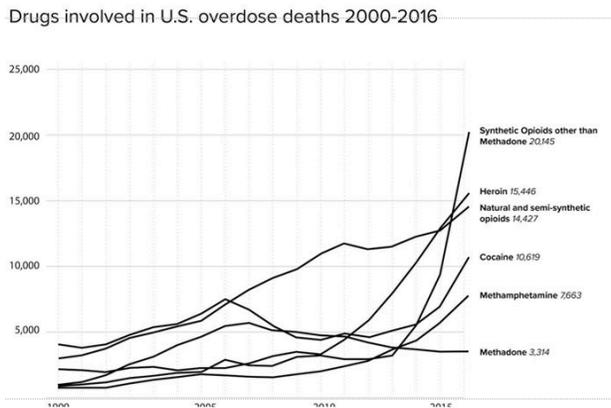


Figure 1. Drugs Involved in US overdose deaths 2000-2016. The number of overdose deaths involving opioid continues to rise, mostly due to fentanyl.

major public health burden poses for years to come. But as a human being, I was drawn into the complex nexus the crisis entails, with implications in socioeconomic status, race, pre-existing conditions, and myriad environmental factors. When I read that 75,000 Americans died in 2018 from opioid-related overdoses, I knew this was a topic that required communicating to the public.

My overall goal for the project was to increase public awareness America's opioid crisis by providing an interactive presentation. I knew this would be rather ambitious, so I chose to narrow my audience to specifically

pre-health professional undergraduate students at the University of Iowa.

The next phase of implementation was conducting background research. I completed an extensive literature review to educate myself about classes and mechanisms of opioids, the history of the crisis, relevant statistics, at-risk populations, current interventions, and statistical projections. Being a student at the University of Iowa, I wanted to make my presentation reflective of the greater Iowa City area. Once I felt I had a working knowledge, I extended my search to finding potential local partners.

I reached out to the Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition (IHRC), an organization that serves eastern Iowa and other local constituents to raise awareness about opioid addiction and the

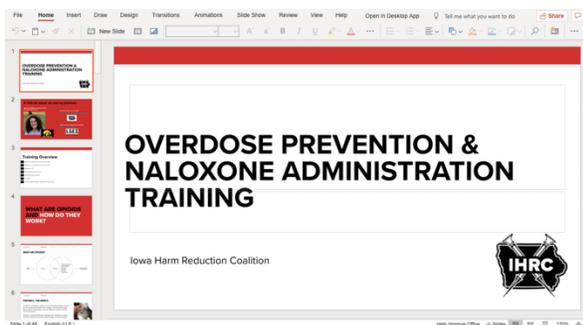


Figure 2. Presentation Overview. The PowerPoint included information about opioids, overdose symptoms, history of the opioid crisis, and how to administer Narcan.

crisis, while providing support to those battling addiction. I met with their Executive Director, Sarah Ziegenhorn, and maintained our relationship for the entirety of my project. I visited IHRC's headquarters in Cedar Rapids and Sarah provided me with a copy of a presentation she uses to train volunteers and organizations, which I modified to fit my target audience. I established additional partnerships with on-campus organizations and majors: Medicus, UI's College of Nursing, Pre-Physician Assistant Club, UI's College of Public of Health, and IC RED.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, much of my original event had to be altered. Instead of an in-person presentation and Narcan administration workshop, I transitioned to an online

livestream format. I delivered the presentation via Facebook Live using our class's page, Stem-o-sphere. Due to some technical difficulties, I had to deliver my presentation without visual aids found within my PowerPoint presentation. At the peak of the stream, I was speaking in front of about 30 people. I had only expected about 10-15 people to tune in, so I was ecstatic with the turn out. I was able to reach people in my original target audience of pre-health students, while also reaching my sorority sisters, family, friends, and IHRC supporters.

I plan to continue my work with the Iowa Harm Reduction Coalition by becoming a volunteer. I hope to continue working with local and university organizations to deliver Narcan and opioid overdose prevention information. This subject matter can be adjusted to fit different audiences, including number of people, occupation, and age.

I learned many things as a Latham Fellow, but I'll only mention two. First, I learned that no matter how tediously you plan and how many fallback strategies you have, your event can still go haywire in an instant. Like many people, my life and my plans were flipped upside down this past spring. I changed course and found a way to educate people with potentially life-saving information, and that's what really mattered to me. Second, I found that when you lead with genuine interest and passion, people are more than willing to help you. I was incredibly fortunate to have generous partners and knowledgeable instructors to make my plans come to fruition. I know I will carry these two lessons with me on my future endeavors.



Figure 3. Final marketing post. Due to circumstances surrounding the coronavirus, the presentation was moved to a Facebook Live platform.