2020

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Recommended Citation

Khan, Fatima A. and Mann, Elise M. (2020) "Student Pharmacists Bridging the Gap with Community Partnerships: Purdue University College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists Chapter," *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

DOI: 10.5703/1288284317232

Available at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/pjsl/vol7/iss1/7>

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STUDENT PHARMACISTS BRIDGING THE GAP WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:

Purdue University College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists Chapter

Fatima A. Khan (*College of Pharmacy*) and Elise M. Mann (*College of Pharmacy*)

STUDENT AUTHOR BIO SKETCHES

Fatima A. Khan is a third-year professional student in the Purdue University College of Pharmacy. She has been involved with the College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists (CPNP) for the past two years, which provided an outlet for her to advocate for mental health and substance use disorders. In her role as president of the CPNP Purdue chapter, she aimed to create more conversation regarding mental health in the College of Pharmacy and educate the Greater Lafayette community about harm reduction.

Elise M. Mann is a third-year professional student in the Purdue University College of Pharmacy. She had early involvement with Purdue Crew and Purdue Musical Organizations, which fueled an interest in community service and engagement. Upon joining CPNP Purdue, she followed a passion to educate and serve those with mental illness and substance use disorders. This article outlines her efforts as vice president of CPNP Purdue and the impact that was made on the Lafayette community. She plans to continue serving the mental health community as a clinical pharmacist after graduation.

INTRODUCTION

Each year in the United States, millions of people are affected by mental illness. In 2018, approximately 19.1% of adults in the United States experienced mental illness, representing one in five adults. When an individual is battling a mental illness, ripple effects of their condition can range from being mild to debilitating. These effects include being at an increased risk for developing cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, a higher rate of unemployment or dropping out of school, and suicidal ideation. To help fight the battle against mental illness, the National Alliance on Mental Illness–West Central Indiana (NAMI–WCI) has made it their mission to provide advocacy, education, support, and public awareness

to ensure all individuals and families that are affected by mental illness can build better lives.

Many individuals who experience mental illness also struggle with a substance use disorder. In 2017, 19.7 million American adults struggled with a substance use disorder, with 8.5 million adults in that group also suffering from a mental health disorder. The devastating impacts that result from substance use disorders can threaten many aspects of an individual's life: relationships, careers, and overall health and safety. Through sharing contaminated drug equipment, individuals expose themselves to infectious diseases, some lasting a lifetime. Such life-threatening consequences that are often accompanied by intravenous substance use is an

increased incidence of blood-borne infections such as viral hepatitis, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and bacterial and fungal infections. About 10% of new HIV diagnoses in the United States are attributed to injection drug use alone. To combat this, Home with Hope, a nonprofit organization in Lafayette, has made it their mission to help members of our community overcome their struggles with addiction.

As pharmacy students, we are introduced to a multitude of illnesses and treatments that we study and will optimize as future pharmacists. Some students gravitate toward certain topics more than others, and the two of us found ourselves leaning into lectures on mental illness, substance use disorder, and harm reduction strategies. During our second professional year, the psychiatric and neurologic pharmacy unit was taught in Integrated Pharmacotherapy III (PHRM 845) and we were able to fully dive into these topics of interest. The coursework complemented our leadership involvement in the Purdue University CPNP Chapter, with Fatima and Elise serving as president and vice president, respectively. CPNP (College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists) provides hands-on experience for members to learn more about psychiatric and neurologic disorders outside of the classroom. Student members have been able to provide a special perspective on how mental illness affects the body and educate on different treatment options that are available. It is through this student organization that we join NAMI and Home with Hope in their efforts to create a community where members struggling with mental illness or substance use disorder are informed, supported, and embraced.

Our project required a two-pronged approach in order to address the unique needs of both our community partners, NAMI and Home with Hope. However, our project objectives were holistic and included the following:

- Raise awareness and advocate for mental health
- Reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use disorder
- Address the needs of community partnerships by contributing resources and volunteers
- Educate community members on pertinent diseases such as HIV and hepatitis C
- Encourage adherence and safe medication use

Through collaboration with our partners, we recognized a vital role for students to help address these objectives. As medication experts in training, Purdue pharmacy students can provide medical and drug information in a

way that is patient-friendly and more easily understood by the public. Generating an understanding about the complex medications used to treat mental illness is an important factor in a safe and successful treatment regimen. According to the CDC, nonadherence is associated with higher rates of hospital admissions, suboptimal health outcomes, increased morbidity and mortality, and increased health care costs. Approximately one in five new prescriptions are never filled, and among those filled, approximately 50% are taken incorrectly, particularly with regard to timing, dosage, frequency, and duration. Similarly, substance use disorders require individuals to remain strictly adherent to medication-assisted treatment (MAT) therapies. This same level of adherence is critical for positive outcomes with antiretroviral therapies to treat HIV or other infectious diseases. With this information in mind, it was evident that our project goals with NAMI and Home with Hope were relevant and purposeful.

DESCRIPTION

NAMI advocates for support, education, and effective treatment for individuals directly or indirectly affected by mental illness in the community. NAMI-WCI is located in Lafayette, Indiana and hosts support groups and educational classes for both patients and their families, where they are able to discuss their feelings and concerns while learning in a safe environment. Additionally, NAMI works with the general public by giving presentations throughout the community in order to raise awareness and end the stigma surrounding mental illnesses. All programs offered are free to participants. Service opportunities are generated due to the nature of needing fundraising for these programs. This is the first community partner that the two of us connected with, where we lead CPNP students to serve by fundraising, volunteering, and educating.

The NAMI Fall Classic 5K race is an annual event that the CPNP Purdue chapter has historically contributed to. During the fall of 2019, we both organized to sell NAMI “Human” T-shirts on Purdue’s campus alongside other CPNP members to fundraise for and benefit NAMI. We set up a table outside of popular campus buildings, such as the Wilmett Active Learning Center (WALC) and the Stewart Center. This attracted the attention of pedestrians who could then stop by and learn more about NAMI, the 5K event, and purchase a T-shirt. During the NAMI 5K on October 13, 2019, our organization manned a table near the registration and start of the race. Fatima and other students handed out Deterra bags and safe drug disposal guides to volunteers and participants. Deterra bags are user-friendly packs that deactivate

drugs in three simple steps and can be used for pills, patches, liquids, and creams. This allowed community members to take home a resource to safely dispose of unused medications at home. It also allowed an outlet for participants to ask student pharmacists questions about safe drug disposal or any general medication questions that they had. The race itself was held at the former Lafayette Municipal Golf Course and displayed mental health facts and statistics along the racecourse to help raise awareness among the participants. For Elise and the other CPNP members who ran or walked the 5K race, there was a strong sense of community as we crossed the finish line and cheers of celebration rang out.

The NAMI Beautiful Minds Gala was held at Carnahan Hall on March 7, 2020. The gala celebrates musicians who have battled mental illness and is a night full of live music, food, and entertainment. Joining alongside several CPNP Purdue students, we assisted with the greeting, seating, and tear-down of the event. Prior to the event, we relayed mental illness statistics and impact in Lafayette through cold-calls to businesses in an effort to advertise the importance of the fundraiser. We wanted to emphasize just how personal this cause was, and that mental illness is touching the lives of fellow coworkers, partners, families, and friends in the community. These efforts to get local businesses on board helped to contribute to the overall fundraising goal. Additionally, the two of us coordinated and volunteered time to craft the centerpieces for the gala. We collected recycled wine bottles, cleaned and prepared them, and decorated the inside with multicolored LED lights. The crafting added a personal touch to the gala decor and the centerpieces illuminated each table throughout the night. These were then sold at the end of the night as an additional fundraising opportunity. Both the Fall Classic 5K and Beautiful Minds Gala are opportunities through NAMI that are available to students annually.

Home with Hope is the only facility of its kind in the Lafayette area that provides a continuum of care, often following primary treatment or detox for alcoholism and other substance use disorders. They help their clients learn how to live as productive members of the community and believe that recovery works through safe, structured, and sober living. As another nonprofit organization, Home with Hope relies on community partners and donations in order to continue providing their valuable services. It is through this need for donations that both of us saw an opportunity for CPNP students to serve.

We first arranged a meeting with the executive director at Home with Hope to discuss client needs in relation to

health care. The moment we began talking, it was obvious how passionate this organization was about helping their clients. The spirit of serving was contagious as we learned more about individual success stories and the progress that has been made over the last few years. It was shared that clients often have difficulty managing their medications and that certain medical supplies were running low in the housing units. The Purdue Service-Learning Grant awarded us \$1,460 to apply toward this cause. After some careful planning, it was determined that the grant would fund 6 large first aid kits, 100 medication organizers, and 50 HIV/STD tests (Figures 1 and 2). These supplies were ordered and obtained through collaboration with the Purdue University Pharmacy and the Tippecanoe County Health Department.

Later, the two of us and another CPNP Purdue student were given the opportunity to tour Home with Hope and the housing facilities when distributing the donated

Figure 1. Grant-funded medication organizer donated to Home with Hope.

Figure 2. Grant-funded first aid kit donated to Home with Hope.

supplies. This provided an opportunity to get a clearer image of exactly where the resources were going and who they were going to. We met clients face-to-face who thanked us for the donations and who politely offered to show us around the facilities and talk about their experiences. We wrapped up the tour back with the executive director in her office. She showed us a wall of pictures, each representing a current client who was on their recovery journey at Home with Hope. We both asked questions about what we saw that day, talked about recovery success stories and tragedies, and how substance use disorder certainly does not discriminate against age, race, or socioeconomic class.

Finally, we wanted to tie the project together by educating community members. Because we were providing free HIV/STD testing, we both thought that holding a session on HIV prevention and treatment would be a perfect way to utilize our skills as student pharmacists and reinforce the grant funding. With the help of fellow CPNP members, we formulated patient-friendly information sheets and held a small-group topic discussion on HIV, PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis), and PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis). We held this interactive discussion with approximately 30 Home with Hope clients at the SURF (Service Unity Recovery Fellowship) Center on February 24, 2020.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

When students support community partners like NAMI and Home with Hope, there are both tangible and intangible impacts. CPNP members often measure outcomes by how many community members we have been able to reach or impact through our project efforts. For example,

by supporting NAMI through fundraising and volunteering we know that we are helping sustain support groups, classes/presentations, and community events. According to the 2019 Annual Report from NAMI, approximately 336 support groups, 222 family classes, and 829 presentations were held. These are staggering numbers when we take a step back and acknowledge the families and individual lives these resources impact in both big and small ways. Those struggling with mental health issues who are confused about what they are experiencing or are unsure of available resources have a safe and informative outlet through NAMI. Without donations and fundraising efforts, these opportunities would not survive.

Community members were noticeably grateful for the help that went into the NAMI Beautiful Minds Gala. We were both warmly referred to as the “Humans” throughout the evening as we represented the colorful NAMI “Human” T-shirt design (Figure 3). We witnessed a student receive praise and a standing ovation after her touching personal story about mental illness and her call to prioritize consistent self-care. For those who are younger struggling with mental illness, it can be especially impactful to hear from a peer who can relate on a deeper, more personal level. It also helped to exemplify how mental illness does not discriminate by age, gender, education level, or economic background. By the end of the night, over \$10,000 was fundraised and then later matched to total approximately \$20,000 in support of NAMI.

For Home with Hope, the two of us have estimated that over 200 community members have been or will be impacted by this project. Through health supplies alone, we know that first aid kits are now available in the housing units and that 100 Home with Hope clients are now guaranteed to have medication organizers throughout their stay. We understand that patients with substance use disorders often struggle with mental illness or have other comorbid health conditions. These patients may be juggling multiple medications and the timing and adherence of their medication can be made far simpler by introducing an AM/PM seven-day pill organizer. This will allow patients to worry less about their medications and better focus their energy and efforts on their recovery journey.

Elise is particularly excited about the grant funding that has allowed 50 clients to receive free HIV/STD testing through Home with Hope and the Tippecanoe County Health Department. This resource is predicted to sustain Home with Hope for a year. It is known that those with substance use disorders may be sharing needles or

Figure 3. CPNP members at the 2020 NAMI Beautiful Minds Gala.

engaging in risky behavior that increases the likelihood of contracting HIV, hepatitis C, or other sexually transmitted infections. Testing is an easy way to raise awareness, receive any necessary treatment early on, and practice harm reduction.

We were both able to hit home with these points during the small-group topic discussions on HIV, PrEP, and PEP. Several of the participants had an outdated understanding of HIV, still viewing it as a death sentence with no effective or safe treatment in sight. We were able to educate approximately 30 Home with Hope clients on up-to-date information and treatment options. The more informal, student-led session allowed the clients to feel more comfortable and relaxed versus other settings that may potentially be intimidating or less accessible. Throughout the session, the community members were engaged and interactive with questions and personal anecdotes that added value to the learning experience.

We encourage future students and organization leaders to push past the challenges of scheduling conflicts as academia becomes more demanding and time consuming. Activities in the community with NAMI and Home with

Hope require intentional, consistent efforts. As students move on, recurring events such as the annual NAMI Fall Classic 5K or Beautiful Minds Gala can be passed down and sustained. Other aspects of this project will require vision and a drive to venture new ideas.

STUDENT IMPACT

Having the opportunity to work with both groups, NAMI and Home with Hope, our awareness of how mental health and substance use disorders can manifest in a variety of people has been enhanced. Both of us have volunteered in each setting and in turn, have had direct encounters and made interventions with those struggling with these disorders. Through this, we have utilized the opportunity to apply what we learned in the classroom. Most notably, we have identified the importance of empathy and serving as advocates for the invisible battles that many people face on a daily basis.

Many of the individuals who utilize these community resources come from diverse backgrounds and each have a story to tell. During a small-group discussion at Home with Hope, I (Fatima) recall having a conversation with

one of the residents. After a few question and answer exchanges about HIV medications, he started telling me about his recent experience in a correctional facility. I found myself nodding along, unsure of how to relate to his experience. However, I quickly realized that my ability to relate in this situation was not as important as just listening to what he wanted to share with me that day.

Using active listening skills that we have been taught in pharmacy school, I felt gratified that he continued to share his struggles with me in such a brief interaction. When we, as students, practice listening to the stories of others and find ways to connect with them, we learn the importance of simply being a listening ear. This is arguably one of the most important skills a pharmacist can have. Pharmacists are often considered to be the most accessible health care provider. This means that many people seek our advice and expertise as their first point of contact. In an often vulnerable state, patients are looking for someone to listen and care. This experience has taught us how to practice being attentive while offering our knowledge and guidance, even when we may not be able to directly relate to the situation.

Through the various activities and events we participated in with these community partners, we, alongside the rest of the CPNP Purdue chapter, were able to put a face to a disorder that was taught in pharmacy school. By this process, our knowledge of these disorders becomes strengthened as we tie it to a personal experience. There were many instances while volunteering with NAMI in which we have been taken aback after realizing a certain individual struggled with a seemingly debilitating mental illness. This proved to us that mental illness does not discriminate and many people are facing challenges that some may never believe by just looking at them. When a patient with mental illness enters a pharmacy, there are often no external indicators that tell you what the individual is struggling with. Through this experience, it has become clear to us that showing empathy and understanding to every patient that we encounter as future pharmacists is critical.

Not to mention, each step in this project allowed both of us to strengthen leadership skills such as effective communication with community partners, organizing successful events, and inspiring participation and volunteerism. We were able to exercise other practical skills such as grant writing, converting information into patient-friendly handouts, and educating underserved populations. We were given the opportunity to share our project for a poster presentation, which sparked great conversations with other community members who had

fresh perspectives and ideas to share for project expansion in the future. There is no doubt that the experiences from this community service have facilitated our paths of personal and professional development.

One challenge that the two of us faced included assisting in the planning and execution of community events that were outside the realm of campus. Our understanding of effective communication and community outreach became increasingly enhanced as we relied on outside resources to help us accomplish our goals for both partnerships. Looking forward, we hope to continue building upon the sustainability of our partnerships with both NAMI and Home with Hope. In the future, we anticipate increasing our level of involvement with these organizations by creating more opportunities for student volunteers, depending on the specific needs of these groups. Additionally, there were instances in which we hoped to follow up with certain individuals that we had extensive interactions with. It would be of great benefit to students and the community leaders if we created more consistent opportunities for students to volunteer with NAMI and Home with Hope. This sustained level of interaction would help solidify our relationships and further propel our knowledge and empathy toward people struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of creating and maintaining community partnerships extends to both the organizations and students involved. As the two of us aided in the missions of both the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Home with Hope, students have become civic-minded leaders in our community and on campus. With these organizations relying on outside funding and requiring volunteers to assist in their efforts, there are numerous opportunities to become involved as we plan to expand these partnerships. By breaking barriers and venturing outside the classroom, a myriad of lessons can be learned about individuals who battle unseen struggles.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To our writing mentor and unwavering source of support for all of CPNP, Dr. Carol Ott, for identifying our passions and always steering us in the right direction. To Sheri Moore for dedicating her time and efforts to NAMI–WCI and Allison Miner for her diligent work at Home with Hope. Without these individuals, our experiences would not have been made possible.

Khan, F., & Mann, E. M. (2020). Student Pharmacists Bridging the Gap with Community Partnerships: Purdue University College of Psychiatric and Neurologic Pharmacists Chapter. *Purdue Journal of Service-Learning and International Engagement*, 7, 34–40. <https://doi.org/10.5703/1288284317232>