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Title of Abstract: Hot Topics: PA Student Consultants Confront the Opioid Epidemic

Problem/Needs Assessment:

In 2016, 2.2 million Americans were identified by the Surgeon General as having opioid use disorder. In 2017, the N.C. State legislature passed the Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention (STOP) Act. Providers are restricted on quantities of opioids prescribed for acute and post-operative pain.

Program Objective:

PA students served as consultants on the topic and provided feedback to health system PA leadership.

Description of Program:

Didactic year PA students (n=176), Classes of 2019 and 2020 were given five questions (Table 1) to explore in 22 learner focus groups and provide feedback on their recommendations for institutional operations, education of practicing PAs, outcomes data review & action plans, PA leadership solutions to the epidemic and ideas for community impact projects.

Evaluation/Assessment:

The 22 student groups agreed continuing education is needed to educate PAs on regulatory changes. Student groups were split on the institution taking a proactive approach to applying STOP Act language to all providers. On the STOP Act impacting opioid prescribing and related deaths, groups overwhelmingly responded "yes." Numerous groups identified unintended consequences of the STOP Act including increases in patients seeking illicit drugs and increased burden for chronic pain patients. Qualitative CL 2019 feedback indicated student satisfaction with the sessions. Beginning with CL2020, students completed point of event surveys on session meeting stated objectives and instructor's effective delivery of content. Eighty-nine percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed the session met its objectives and the instructor was effective (M=4.36). Items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5-strongly agree, 1-strongly disagree).

Conclusions and Lessons Learned:

Integrating health policy curriculum into the learning experience for all medical learners has gained in importance. After passage of NC STOP Act, programs are challenged with introducing this important topic. Engaging students in the learning process on the vital importance of health policy encourages them to feel empowered to impact policies. This innovative consultancy format enables comfort with presenting ideas to institutional PA leadership. Focus groups encourage providing creative operational solutions to the health system and proposing community-based interventions. Suggested activities resulting from this curriculum have been implemented. (Table 2)

References:

1. North Carolina Medical Board. FORUM. Issue No. 2. Summer 2017. Available at: https://www.ncmedboard.org/images/uploads/publications_uploads/Summer_2017_Forum.pdf
2. Adam J. Gordon & John Daniel Harding Jr. (2017) From education to practice: Addressing opioid misuse through health care provider training: A special issue of Substance Abuse journal, Substance Abuse, 38:2, 119-121, DOI: 10.1080/08897077.2017.1309938.

3. Jonathan H. Chen, MD, PhD, Keith Humphreys, PhD, Nigam H. Shah, MBBS, PhD, Anna Lembke, MD. Distribution of Opioids by Different Types of Medicare Prescribers. *JAMA* 2016;176(2)259-261.