

DataHaven

Classroom Materials

Title of Material: Opioid Crisis Substance Abuse Disorder (Stations)

Topics Discussed: Public health crisis, opioid usage and abuse, opioid epidemic, stigma, Substance Abuse Disorder

Skills Utilized: Reading skills, data analysis, problem solving, reflective questions

Format: Station activity, thought questions can be discussed

In Person or Online: In person

Procedure/Instruction Suggestions:

Station activities are a great opportunity to have students move around the room while working in a group and covering lots of information in one class period. Print out one copy of each station and put it on a table, the room being set up with however many station tables are needed. Students do not write on these printouts, they write on the answer sheet (provided). This way, paper is conserved, you don't have to worry as much about computers shutting down, and the handouts are easy to collect or turn in online.

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Station One: Background

Background: A wave of drug abuse has gripped the nation for decades, and unfortunately, it is getting worse. Opioids, which includes addictive substances like heroin, fentanyl, codeine, hydrocodone, and vicodin, are at the center of this crisis which kills on average 130 Americans daily (CDC). Many of the individuals that are addicted to opioids started with a prescription for pain, like after a surgery. However, there are many factors to consider when we attempt to confront this crisis.

The opioid crisis, as well as addiction, has a social stigma attached to it. A stigma is a disapproval of something or someone that separates them from others. Drug users are often concluded to be at fault and not deserving of services because of their drug use. Factors like childhood upbringing, genetics, medical history, and traumas that can impact drug use are not always considered, and addiction is not always viewed as biological disease. Opioids are highly addictive, as they release “feel good” chemicals in your brain called endorphins. This feeling is temporary though, so users continue to seek out and use the drug. Further, services that help users get better from their addictions, like rehab clinics and methadone clinics, are also stigmatized, making recovery even more difficult.

The opioid crisis has been making headlines for the last few years across the country as abuse of and addiction to opiates and opioids has increased dramatically, with some of the highest overdose death rates occurring in the northeast U.S. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this epidemic of overdoses has been going on for a long time, but hasn’t always looked the same. Prescription opioids were the main drivers of the first wave in the 1990s; heroin was largely responsible for the rise in 2010; and synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, have driven the current wave, which began in 2013.

Nationwide efforts have been made to confront this ongoing epidemic. Various treatment and advocacy initiatives hope to help individuals heal from their addiction and to educate society on the crisis. Ongoing conversation about prescribing opioids and about how we can reform healthcare in a way to help this crisis are more accepted and commonplace. However, until addiction is understood as a social and healthcare concern rather than purely a personal choice, and the stigma persists, the fight to end the opioid crisis will struggle.

Thought Questions: Find “Station One” on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. What is a stigma? What is another example of stigma other than drug use?
2. How can the stigma about drug use hurt the efforts to confront the opioid crisis?
3. Why is it important to know that the causes of overdoses is shifting? How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Two

An important question must be asked: who is getting addicted to opioids and overdosing? There are several factors and trends to consider to further understand this crisis. Throughout Connecticut, men make up much larger shares of drug overdose deaths than women: since 2012, women have never accounted for more than a third of the state's overdose deaths in a given year. Connecticut's city centers have the highest burden of overdoses, followed by rural areas. By age, overdose rates are historically highest among 25 - 44 year olds. However, trends among all age groups have been increasing.

Thought Questions: Find "Station Two" on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given data and write in complete sentences.

1. Do men or women make up a larger share of drug overdose deaths in Connecticut?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Three

One notable difference between Greater Hartford and other parts of the state is in opioid overdose death rates by race: elsewhere, white residents have been dying at higher rates than Black or Latino residents. In Greater Hartford between 2015 and 2018, the age-adjusted overdose death rate for Latinos was slightly higher at 32.2 per 100,000 residents per year than for white residents at 30.6 per year. Black residents' rate is much lower at 17.1 per 100,000 per year. In the New Haven region, rates for white residents were higher: between 2015 and 2018, white residents' age-adjusted overdose death rate was 29.1 per 100,000 residents per year, higher than Black residents' rate of 22.6 and Latinos' 12.9. In Fairfield County, rates for white residents were higher as well: between 2015 and 2018, white residents' age-adjusted overdose death rate was 18.8 per 100,000 residents per year, higher than Black residents' rate of 14.1 or Latinos' 11.5 per year.

Thought Questions: Find "Station Three" on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given data and write in complete sentences.

1. What are some of the death rate trends by race in Connecticut? Are they the same in each region?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Four

Crucial to ending the opioid crisis is the work of treatment programs and initiatives aimed at helping those who are struggling with opioid addiction and overdoses. In Connecticut between 2014 and 2018, treatment programs were heavily utilized by residents — Greater Hartford residents were admitted to opioid treatment programs a total of 34,425 times, New Haven residents 20,140 times, and Fairfield residents 24,302 times. These programs are fundamental in confronting and bringing this crisis to an end. These treatment options can range from facility care, inpatient care, outpatient support, medication, mentor programs, 12-step programs, counseling and more. Methadone clinics, which can help individuals who are addicted to opioids detox and wean themselves off of opioids, also play a pivotal role in safe treatment for opioid abuse. Methadone is also an opioid, but has weaker addictive effects, and so it allows people to transition away from opioid abuse. Narcan, which reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, can save lives when administered. However, it is only the first step towards recovery.

Withdrawal from opioids can be very dangerous, so these treatments and breaking an addiction must be well planned, executed, and monitored. There's always a risk for relapse, or someone beginning to abuse opioids again, which is also a part of receiving treatment. An individual with an addiction to opioids must keep working to make sure they recover and stay well; if they do relapse, they must continue to work to recover once again.

“Opioid Use Disorder, or OUD, is the problematic, excessive use of opioid. It is an addiction that can develop after repeated opioid misuse or using opioids for reasons other than medical need, typically in dangerous amounts. OUD can affect people from all walks of life, who may use any of a wide range of drugs from different sources, including street drugs like heroin, illegally purchased opioids, and painkillers which may be used in hospital situations— like codeine or Oxycontin. Anyone can be at risk for developing OUD if they are using an opioid”.

- Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Thought Questions: Find “Station Four” on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given data and write in complete sentences.

1. What is OUD?
2. What kind of treatment options are there for individuals that are addicted? How is having different treatment options beneficial?
3. What are some roadblocks to recovery?
4. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Five

The reach of the opioid crisis goes beyond just people who have struggled with addiction themselves. In the 2018, nearly one in every three adults in Greater New Haven County reported knowing someone who has struggled with opioid abuse or addiction in the past three years. Out of that one-third of respondents, 6% said they themselves were struggling with opioids, 40% cited a family member, 38% cited a close friend, and 44% cited an acquaintance. These numbers include adults who knew multiple people dealing with addiction. In Hartford County, 24% reported knowing at least one person who died of an opioid overdose. In Fairfield County, 37% cited a family member struggling with painkillers and opioids, 33% cited a close friend, 54% cited an acquaintance, and 6% said they themselves were dealing with this issue.

Thought Questions: Find “Station Five” on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given data and write in complete sentences.

1. How can we support people who know someone struggling with addiction?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Final Reflection

Thought Questions: Find “Station Six” on your answer sheet and answer the following questions in the provided space. Use the given data and write in complete sentences.

1. Looking at all the given data, what can we do as a state to help confront the opioid crisis? Cite at least two of the themes (any background information, trends on gender, race, treatment programs, and families) in your response.
2. What can you do to help confront this crisis? Think about what power you have, as a young student, to create positive change and confront this crisis.

Name:

Period:

Opioid Crisis Stations Answer Sheet

Station One

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. What is a stigma? What is another example of stigma other than drug use?
2. How can the stigma about drug use hurt the efforts to confront the opioid crisis?
3. Why is it important to know that the causes of overdoses (prescriptions to heroin to fentanyl) is shifting? How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Two

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. Do men or women make up a larger share of drug overdose deaths in Connecticut?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Three

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. What are some of the death rate trends by race in Connecticut? Are they the same in each region?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Four

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. What is OUD?
2. What kind of treatment options are there for individuals that are addicted? How is having different treatment options beneficial?
3. What are some roadblocks to recovery?
4. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Station Five

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. How can we support people who know someone struggling with addiction?
2. How can that data help inform our efforts to confront this opioid crisis?

Final Reflection

Thought Questions: Use the given background and write in complete sentences.

1. Looking at all the given data, what can we do as a state to help confront the opioid crisis? Cite at least two of the themes (any background information, trends on gender, race, treatment programs, and families) in your response.
2. What can you do to help confront this crisis? Think about what power you have, as a young student, to create positive change and confront this crisis. **4-6 sentences at least.**