

Statement on Addiction and Overdose Prevention in Curriculum

Greetings,

We, the members of the Student Osteopathic Medical Association (SOMA) Overdose Prevention Task Force (OPTF) as current medical students, are saddened and concerned as the overdose epidemic worsens throughout the nation. Provisional data from the CDC estimates more than [107,000 people who died from an overdose death in 2021](#), with 3/4 of those individuals dying due to an opioid-related overdose. Since 1999, [more than 932,000 people have died from a drug-related overdose](#), which is more individuals than [military personnel who died in World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and Persian War combined](#). When it comes to substance use disorder, the 2020 national substance use survey administered by SAMHSA found that [38.7 million individuals in the US](#) 18 or older had a substance use disorder. Of those with a substance use disorder in 2019, only [10% reported receiving care](#). Unfortunately, addiction and overdose [disproportionately affect](#) our communities of color, further worsening disparities in healthcare.

These statistics make clear that the physicians of the future must be prepared to address overdose and have an adequate education in addiction medicine. SOMA recognizes that addiction and overdose prevention is a public health issue that has worsened in the wake of the COVID 2019 pandemic, affecting all individuals. Despite the overwhelming evidence that physicians must lead the health effort in combatting the overdose and addiction epidemics, interventions and substance use treatments services can be severely lacking. Reports highlight that most individuals with an addiction [do not receive treatment from a physician](#), and instead from individuals who may not be equipped with the knowledge or credentials to provide the full range of treatment services.

This failure to respond to a significant public health issue can partially be attributed to a failure of our medical institutions in training physicians in addiction medicine and overdose prevention. Despite substance use disorder being as ubiquitous as diabetes and hypertension, it is minimally covered in most undergraduate medical curriculum. Addiction specialists as well as expert panels have made [multiple recommendations](#) that all medical students should demonstrate an understanding of screening, brief intervention, and referral for treatment in substance use disorder (SBIRT). Furthermore, all schools should provide guidance on overdose prevention, including the training and distribution of life-saving medications for the reversal of opioid-related overdoses.

There is a [large body of evidence](#) confirming that exposure to substance use curriculum as well as exposure to individuals with a substance use disorder significantly improves medical students' knowledge and confidence in addressing substance use disorder.

In order to address the overdose epidemic and improve access to treatment for substance use disorder, **we call to action all medical schools accredited by AOA's Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation (COCA)**. We recognize the multiple osteopathic institutions who have already incorporated some substance use treatment services and overdose prevention into their pre-clinical curriculum. However, to ensure standardization in

education on addiction and overdose preventions, we strongly urge the AOA and AACOM to expand [Section II of the Osteopathic Core Competencies: Medical Knowledge](#) to include a new **element K. titled “Substance Use Disorder and Overdose Prevention”**. We also urge the expansion of Section VIII of the Osteopathic Core Competencies: Counseling for Health Promotion/Disease Prevention Competencies to include new elements **11. titled “Recognize the elements of Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) in the treatment of substance use disorder”** and **12. “Demonstrate recognition of how to respond to an overdose”**

Call to Action:

- 1. We ask that AACOM and AOA convene a task force to consider the incorporation of the substance use disorder and overdose prevention as outlined above in to osteopathic core competency curriculum.**
 - a. This task force should be comprised of relevant AOA/AACOM stakeholders, experts in substance use treatment services and overdose prevention, and students.
- 2. We ask that all COM’s incorporate Substance Use Disorder and Overdose Prevention into Undergraduate Medical Curriculum**
 - a. Curriculum may include, but not be limited to:
 - i Pharmacology of substances of use and recognition of symptoms of intoxication, overdose and withdrawal
 - ii Understanding the neurobiology of addiction, intoxication and withdrawal of various substances
 - iii Medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD)
 - iv Management of overdose for multiple substances
 - v Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) for substance use disorders
 - vi The management of co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders
 - vii Management of substance use disorder in special populations (children, adolescents, pregnant individuals)
 - viii Pain Management and Safe Prescribing

As future osteopathic physicians, we ask that the above be strongly considered as a step moving towards improving the lives of our future patients.

Sincerely,

SOMA Overdose Prevention Task Force