

Keep Your Pin Up: Students Combating Opioid Use Disorder Stigma with Lapel Pins

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BACKGROUND

Drug overdose death rates continue to soar.

- × In 2020, 1,477 Coloradans died of drug overdoses – the most overdose deaths ever recorded in the state. Fentanyl overdoses more than doubled between 2019 and 2020, and have increased ten-fold since 2016.¹

Access to care is limited: only about a quarter of the 47,000 Coloradans with opioid use disorder (OUD) receive medical treatment for it.

- × In Colorado, 1 in 10 residents live in places with no access to substance use treatment.² During 2016-2017, almost half (46%) of the 702 providers in Colorado holding a federal waiver did not prescribe buprenorphine.³

Stigma with roots in both individual attitudes of providers, as well as the enactment of public policies limiting harm reduction resources in communities, drives (in)access to substance use care.⁴

PURPOSE

We sought to create spaces for students to get involved in addiction medicine and combat stigma by establishing a new interdisciplinary student group to create community and initiating a lapel pin project to increase visibility.

IAMSIG

- × We founded the Interprofessional Addiction Medicine Student Interest Group (IAMSIG) in 2020 with the goal of educating healthcare peers regarding the value of medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), and to view OUD as a medical condition worthy of evidence-based treatment.

Lapel Pin Project

- × We launched our lapel pin project to combat OUD stigma among clinicians at the outset of their careers, hoping the pins will encourage providers to advocate for substance use disorder treatment within our healthcare system without stigmatizing patients who need care.

OUTCOMES

IAMSIG

- × Events have included: Narcan trainings (virtual and in-person), careers in addiction medicine panels with local experts, field trips to Arapahoe County Recovery Court and Denver's Harm Reduction Action Center, book clubs, etc.
- × We established a second chapter at Rocky Vista University College of Osteopathic of Medicine in nearby Parker, CO.
- × Now in its third active year as a group, CU Anschutz's IAMSIG has over 70 members and growing.



Lapel Pin Project



We designed white coat lapel pins with an “X” on them in black and gold (CU’s school colors). The symbol is a nod to the “X Waiver” which previously authorized medical providers to prescribe buprenorphine, an FDA-approved medication for OUD. Thankfully, the waiver requirement was eliminated in January 2023.

Today, the pins remain a visible sign of the wearer’s interest in talking openly about and treating substance use and combating stigma.

- × Since 2020, we have given out over 300 pins to students and faculty.
- × Pins come with a QR code, linking to an infographic about the project and instructions for other programs to make their own pins.
- × We coupled buprenorphine training & education with lapel pin distribution, to create an opportunity for a conversation about OUD treatment, helping facilitate education and translate beliefs into actions.



CLINICAL IMPACTS

Wearing the pin in a clinical setting allows patients and providers alike the opportunity to start a dialogue about drug use. **We published a peer-reviewed reflective commentary in the *Harvard Public Health Review (HPHR) Journal* about such an experience with a patient in a rural setting.**⁵ Read more about it here:



Future directions will explore qualitative experiences of pin wearers, branding, and overall impact.

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