



Longitudinal Professional Enrichment Course

University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine
Office of Medical Education

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Healing in a Broken System: Clinical and Structural Approaches in Addiction Care

Enrollment Period:	Summer 2026
Course Dates:	Thursdays 12-1pm - 6/18/26 - 6/25/26 - 7/2/26 - 7/9/26 - 7/16/26 - 7/23/26
Student Max:	10
Class Year:	MS-1
Course Director:	Maggie Shang, MD, MS Assistant Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics Divisions of General Internal Medicine and General Academic Pediatrics University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine shangm2@upmc.edu
Course Administrator:	Jen Silver, MSW, LSW jensilver@pitt.edu
Location:	Zoom
Registration:	Via Slate – Email will be sent to students in Spring with instructions on how to enroll
Course Description:	This course will equip future physicians with the knowledge, skills, and critical perspectives necessary to care for people who use drugs within a structurally responsive framework. Students will explore the intersections of drug use, treatment, and policy through a lens that centers health equity, harm reduction, and person-centered and trauma-informed care. The curriculum analyzes the historical and contemporary impacts of criminalization, stigma, and systemic racism on addiction treatment and healthcare access. Students will gain a practical understanding of the structural forces that shape patient experiences and outcomes and approach for providing compassionate, evidence-based treatment of substance use disorders that addresses individual needs and systemic barriers.

Goals and Objectives:	By the end of this course, students will be able to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate structural competency by identifying how social, political, and economic systems shape substance use, treatment, and healthcare access. 2. Describe evidence-based approaches for approaching patient-centered withdrawal management, medication initiation, and coordination of care across the care continuum. 3. Critically analyze drug policy and its impact on health outcomes, healthcare systems, and marginalized communities. 4. Apply harm reduction and trauma-informed principles in the clinical care of people who use drugs. 5. Examine the role of intersectionality in shaping individual experiences with substance use, treatment engagement, and recovery. 6. Discuss strategies to advocate for policy and practice changes that promote health equity, reduce stigma, and improve care for people who use drugs.
Pre-Requisites:	None
Requirements:	Attendance and participation during all sessions. Videos should be on during the entire session. Completion of preparatory materials before sessions
Texts:	None. Preparatory materials will be provided prior to all sessions.

COURSE OUTLINE

Session 1 – Models of Addiction

This session explores how different models of addiction shape the ways society understands and responds to substance use. We will examine how language, framing, and implicit bias influence stigma and impact access to care, recovery, and policy.

Session 2 – History of Drug Policy and Criminalization in the U.S.

This session traces the evolution of U.S. drug policy and its deep ties to systems of criminalization, race, and social control. We will explore key historical milestones from early prohibition to the War on Drug and their impact on contemporary approaches to substance use, public health, and justice reform.

Session 3 – Treatment Gaps in Medications for Opioid Use Disorder

This session examines the structural and social determinants that contribute to disparities in treatment for opioid use disorder. We will consider the impact of the opioid crisis in the shifting landscape of treatment for opioid use disorder and discuss strategies to expand equitable access to evidence-based medication treatment.

Session 4 – Structural and Relational Harm Reduction Approaches to Care: Part 1

This session explores healthcare settings as risk environments that exacerbate structural vulnerability and provides a framework for embedding harm reduction at both macro- and micro-levels. We will discuss how applying harm reduction principles to address these risks can create more equitable person-centered and trauma-informed systems.

Session 5 – Structural and Relational Harm Reduction Approaches to Care: Part 2

This session investigates the origins of harm reduction during the HIV epidemic, the development of the syringe service programs, and influence of policy in restricting access to life-saving services. We will also explore the practical tools used to reduce drug-related harms and strategies to integrate them into patient care.

Session 6 – Intersectionality in Caring for PWUD

This session applies an intersectional lens to understand how overlapping identities such as gender, race, housing status, history of incarceration, and co-occurring conditions shape the experiences and care needs of people who use drugs.