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Students in a UMD Class in Medical Sociology break down research into substance use disorder

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Pictured above, from left: Sam Welchance, Julia Lee, Uyen Nguyen. Not pictured: Cassidy Hughes.

UMD students enrolled in Prof. Kim Dauner’s “Medical Sociology” class took up the task of researching the sociology of substance use disorders (SUDs) in rural Minnesota. They shared their findings in a presentation to Wilderness Health, a collective of non-profit hospitals in Northeastern Minnesota and Northwest Wisconsin.

The students recognized “patient centered language” as crucial for the dignity of people undergoing treatment for SUDs, and failure to use such language can cause more harm. Yet one study indicates that only 20% of medical research studies adhered to patient-centered language, and 68% were blatantly non-patient centered. This is a major discrepancy.

The students interviewed LeAnn Littlewolf of the American Indian Community Housing Organization (AICHO). They found that abusive practices in history, such as the boarding school era, led to distrust with the systems of today. Trauma of the past leads to attempts to cope, leading to SUDs. To work on a better future, the students found that ensuring cultural and spiritual connections can lead to healing and trust.

The students, including Cassidy Hughes, Julia Lee, CPhT, Uyen Nguyen, and Sam Welchance, documented these findings and more into a comprehensive report and presentation for Wilderness Health.

According to Professor Kim Dauner,

“As faculty I am always looking for overlap between my learning goals and partner’s goals and this collaboration really hit that sweet spot. Students were able to apply concepts from medical sociology to a real world project aimed at reducing stigma surrounding SUDs in rural communities. The student’s expertise in using library and Internet resources and then summarizing and presenting back their findings helped Wilderness Health learn more about the role of patient-first language in patient-centered SUDs treatment, which was an important step related to their ongoing efforts to improve behavioral health care navigation.”

According to Zomi Bloom, Telehealth Program Manager with Wilderness, “Wilderness Health is excited to utilize what we are learning about SUD as we embark on our behavioral health care navigation grant journey over the next several years.”

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