

Macomb County Judge Linda Davis speaks to students about opioid dangers

More than 300 hundred students and faculty participated in Oakland University's third annual interprofessional workshop on the nation's opioid crisis.



Ryan Rogers, M1 student, Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine

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Longtime Macomb County District Judge Linda Davis recalls a time when she regarded addiction as a “moral failing” that only happened to flawed people from dysfunctional environments. It wasn't until her child, a straight-A student with a promising future, became addicted to heroin that she recognized the truth: “Addiction affects everybody. affects all ages, all races, and all socioeconomic climates. It does not discriminate.”

This was her message to more than 300 hundred students and faculty who participated Oakland University's third annual interprofessional workshop on the nation's opioid crisis. The event was designed to help participants become more familiar with recent government legislation and guidelines regarding opioid use, and to focus on populations and communities – in addition to individual patients – to deliver effective health care.

Opioids include drugs such as Oxycontin, Vicodin and Percocet and can be highly addictive. Davis, who is an OU graduate, noted that roughly 2.1 million Americans are currently struggling with addiction and that the stigma associated with addictive disease often prevents people from seeking help.

“All of you are going to be in helping professions so you can be a real conduit to change a person's life.”

“There's so much self-loathing when you're an addict, and people are so shamed by it, that asking for help is a real challenge,” she said. “If we don't start looking at this problem from all aspects, and working together to bridge the gaps, from prevention, to treatment, to recovery, then we are failing as a nation to do with this in a real, viable way.”

In the midst of her child's struggle and subsequent recovery, Davis made it her mission support other individuals and families affected by addiction. She is founder and president of Families Against Narcotics, a community-based program for those seeking recovery, those in recovery and family members affected by addiction.

“Our mission has always been not to point fingers, but to bring people into the fold that can be part of the solution,” she explained. “We work with pharmacists, doctors, hospitals (and other organizations) to help identify people that might be looking for help.”

Calling herself an “eternal optimist,” Davis encouraged participants – which included students in nursing, medicine, physical therapy and public health – to use their education to help others avoid and overcome the scourge of addiction.

“People do recover,” she said. “All of you are going to be in helping professions, so you can be a real conduit to change a person's life.”

The keynote speech was followed by a panel discussion highlighting multi-disciplinary intervention options to limit the use of opioids. The panel was moderated by Stephen

Loftus, Ph.D., Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine associate professor of medical education, and was composed of four health professionals:

- Ghada Abdallah, RPH., Clinical Pharmacist, Beaumont Health
- Mary Golinski, Ph.D., CCRN, OU Assistant Professor, Nurse Anesthesia Assistant Director
- Sheala Jafry, M.D., Family Medicine Physician, Beaumont Hospital, Troy
- Lisa McKay-Chiasson, Member, Oakland County Health Division Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force

After the panel discussion, students were presented with a case study involving a typical patient in a clinical setting and were tasked with coming up with an intervention plan. The group consisted of graduate students from the School of Nursing, School of Health Sciences and Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, along with a faculty facilitator.

Here's what students had to say about the interprofessional workshop:

“Each profession has a certain skill set, as well as limitations. When you reach your limitations, you need to be aware of that. We need to be humble enough to listen to each other and work as a team to make sure that all points of care are being met for the patient.”

–Ryan Rogers, M1 student, Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine

“No one person can know everything, and sometimes it helps to have another person's eyes and experience on a situation to better assess it and come up with a plan. For example, physical therapy professionals are going to know a lot more about the physical therapy aspect, medical doctors have a wealth of knowledge and expertise, and public health professionals understand the patient population from different angles and take a more holistic view of things.”

–Roxanne Ropponen, Family Nurse Practitioner student, Oakland University School of Nursing

“It's critically important for us to demonstrate our care and concern for the patient, and let them know that we're looking out for their best interests. Prescribing opioids is not necessarily the best way to do that. We talked a lot about education and setting people's expectations up for success, so that after surgery they aren't as surprised if they have pain.”

–Erin Worman, Doctor of Physical Therapy student, Oakland University School of Health Sciences

“It requires an extra step of initiative, leadership and, most importantly, policy change to incentivize interprofessional communication. It's important to educate patients about the side effects of opioids, break the stigma about discussing addiction, and to share community resources to help patients and families who are dealing with opioid-related hurdles.”

–Raya Hollis, Master of Public Health student, Oakland University School of Health Sciences

This year's workshop also included an information session about naloxone (Narcan), a medication used to reverse opioid overdoses. The session was led by Kate Brancheau, Client Services Manager at Transformations Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center and Board Member for Bryan's Hope, a nonprofit community advocacy organization providing awareness, education and support in the battle against opiate/heroin addiction.

The Oakland University Interprofessional Education Task Force, which is composed of faculty from the School of Health Sciences, School of Nursing and Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, organized the workshop. Funding and support for the workshop was provided by the School of Health Sciences; Theta Psi Chapter of the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing; Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine; and Graduate School Physical Therapy Association.