



SIUE School of Pharmacy Adds Mental Health First Aid Training to Curriculum

March 13 2020 11:49 AM

EDWARDSVILLE –A leading institution of pharmaceutical education, the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of Pharmacy (SOP) is one of only a few institutions in the country to have incorporated an important Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training course to its curriculum for first-year (P1) students.

More than 70 students completed the inaugural MHFA training in the spring 2020 semester. The 8-hour skills-based course teaches participants about mental health and substance use disorders. Through active participation, students learn skills such as how to respond if someone is having a panic attack, ask someone about thoughts of suicide, and respond to an opioid overdose.

The training was facilitated by [certified MHFA instructors](#) Kelly Gable, PharmD, professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and psychiatric clinical pharmacist at Family Care Health Centers, and Misty Gonzalez, PharmD, clinical associate professor in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and psychiatric clinical pharmacist at Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

“SIUE School of Pharmacy Dean Mark Luer and faculty overwhelmingly supported the integration of this program into our P1 academic year,” Gonzalez said. “When we incorporate MHFA into the SOP curriculum, it sends a message to both students and the community that having an understanding and knowledge of how to respond to a mental health crisis is just as important as other health crises.”

Moving forward, every P1 will complete the MHFA program as part of their Personal and Professional Development course.

“I am so grateful to have Drs. Gable and Gonzales offer this to our students as trained program facilitators,” said Jessica Kerr, PharmD, associate dean of professional and student affairs. “Training our first-year students guides them to have awareness about

mental health concerns, before the pharmacotherapeutic class sequences. This skill set is important for them to appropriately triage patients, peers, family members or the general public.”

“After completing our first training cohort, we feel confident that our pharmacy students need this experience for their own mental health wellness and to better take care of each other, as well as future patients and communities,” Gable added. “I have no doubt that they left feeling empowered and better equipped to respond to a mental health crisis. This is an opportunity to talk to our students about how they all play a critical role in reducing stigma and enhancing access to mental health care.”

“Pharmacy is a people profession, and the reality is that people, ourselves included, face mental health challenges daily,” said PharmD candidate Deja Finley, of O’Fallon. “It is awesome that we were given the opportunity to learn how to properly identify, understand, and respond to those mental health and substance use concerns. The mental health first aid class taught me a lot and greatly renewed my excitement to continue on the road to becoming truly trauma informed.”

In spring 2020, Gable and Gonzalez also trained a group of 30 SOP faculty and staff, demonstrating the SOP’s shared emphasis on the MHFA program’s value.

Today’s pharmacists improve patients’ lives through the medication and education they provide. Dedicated to developing a community of caring pharmacists, the [SIUE School of Pharmacy](#) curriculum is a model that offers students a unique combination of classroom education, research, community service and patient care. The School of Pharmacy’s areas of excellence include a drug design and discovery core; pediatric practice; chronic pain research and practice; and diabetes research and practice. As the only downstate Illinois pharmacy doctorate program, the SIUE School of Pharmacy is providing highly trained pharmacists prepared for the rapidly changing healthcare environment.

Photo: A group of 30 SOP faculty and staff completed the Mental Health First Aid training program. MHFA facilitators are Dr. Misty Gonzalez (far left) and Dr. Kelly Gable (far right in second row from front).