

SIUE School Of Pharmacy Expands Mental Health First Aid Training To Community

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE – According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), each year, 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness, and 1 in 6 U.S. youth ages 6-17 experience a mental health disorder. Mental Illness Awareness Week (Oct. 3-9) brings to the forefront questions of how an individual can help someone who is developing a mental health condition or experiencing a mental health crisis.

To train individuals in being able to identify, understand and respond to signs of addiction and mental illness, the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville School of

Pharmacy (SOP) incorporated Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) as a requirement into its curriculum. The SOP is now expanding it to reach more students, alumni, faculty, and participating pharmacists.

In 2019, the Department of Pharmacy Practice's Kelly Gable, PharmD, BCPP, professor and director of well-being and resilience, and Misty Gonzalez, PharmD, BCPP, clinical associate professor, completed a 5-day train-the-trainer MHFA course, allowing them to train two classes of SOP students thus far. Through additional grant funding, the SOP recently trained Kate Newman, PharmD, director of experiential education and clinical associate professor, and Stephanie Hunziker, PharmD, clinical assistant professor, and clinical skills coordinator, to offer more MHFA training to the local area.

“We are excited to expand our MHFA skills-based training program beyond our student pharmacists to pharmacists working in our community,” shared Kelly Gable, PharmD. “MHFA is incredibly valuable to pharmacists working in any environment that involves patient care. We all play a role in helping to recognize the early signs and symptoms of a mental health condition, as well as helping to link someone in crisis to the proper mental health support that they might need. We hope to encourage all pharmacists to consider taking MHFA and to actively play a role in reducing stigma and enhancing awareness surrounding mental health wellness and the critical importance of self-care.”

Topics covered in the MHFA training include depression and mood disorders, anxiety disorders, trauma, psychosis, and substance use disorders. Throughout the course, participants will learn how to apply the MHFA action plan in a variety of situations, including when someone experiences panic attacks, suicidal thoughts or behaviors, acute psychosis, overdose or withdrawal from alcohol or drug use, and reaction to a traumatic event.

Because preceptors and alumni have expressed interest in this program, the SOP plans to expand training opportunities in the spring and summer. After participants complete a required two-hour self-study, they can choose to complete the remaining live six-hour learning session in-person or virtually, allowing accommodation for pandemic mandates and pharmacists located outside the area.

In summer 2021, all SOP-affiliated pharmacy residents completed MHFA training. “I firmly believe this training will be beneficial to all who participate,” shared Beth Cady, PharmD and SIUE residency teaching certificate co-coordinator. “I certainly walked away with many tools to better deal with mental health issues that may arise in any situation at work or outside of work. It is our hope that we will soon be able to expand the training to some of our preceptors across the state who work with our residents in the RTC program.”

“I truly enjoyed going through the MHFA certificate training program and realize the importance of receiving this type of training to help those experiencing mental health and substance use challenges,” added Hunziker. “I was excited about the opportunity to become certified as an instructor to expand MHFA certification training opportunities at the SOP, affiliated programs, and among other organizations in our community.”

Those interested in future MHFA trainings can sign up to be notified at [siue.co1.
qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a47SULh8C3rcmlU](https://siue.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a47SULh8C3rcmlU).

Today’s pharmacists improve patients’ lives through the medication and education they provide. The [School of Pharmacy](#) is dedicated to developing a community of caring pharmacists through a curriculum that is nationally recognized as a model for offering students a unique combination of classroom education, research, community service and patient care. Areas of excellence include a drug design and discovery core, pediatric practice, chronic pain research and practice, and diabetes research and practice.