

Preparing Sedgwick County Physicians to Treat Addiction: A Mixed-Methods Study

Jason Nayar, MS-3¹, Melinda Chenault, MPH¹, Elizabeth Ablah, Ph.D.¹

¹The University of Kansas School of Medicine-Wichita, Wichita, Kansas, Department of Population Health

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Introduction. Substance use disorders (SUDs) remain a major public health challenge in the United States, yet many affected individuals do not receive treatment. Physicians play a critical role in identifying and addressing SUD through screening, brief intervention, referral, and treatment; however, barriers such as limited training, stigma, and lack of awareness of treatment resources may limit physician engagement. The purpose of this study was to examine physician practices related to screening, brief intervention, referral, and treatment of SUD in Sedgwick County, Kansas, and to identify barriers and facilitators to providing care.

Methods. We conducted a mixed-methods study using structured qualitative interviews and an electronic survey. Twenty-six attending physicians, residents, and medical students participated in interviews. In addition, an electronic survey distributed to physicians, residents, and medical students in Sedgwick County received 253 responses (17% response rate). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative responses were coded to identify common themes.

Results. Respondents most commonly reported screening for substance use (49%), referring patients to treatment (47%), and providing brief interventions (38%), whereas only 17% reported directly treating SUD. Frequently reported barriers included limited knowledge of local treatment resources, patient resistance or lack of follow-through, and time constraints during clinical encounters.

Conclusions. Nearly half of respondents reported screening and referring patients with suspected SUD, but fewer reported comfort or engagement in direct treatment. Expanding physician training, improving awareness of local treatment resources, and implementing system-level supports may increase physician participation in SUD care and improve access to treatment.