

**Healthcare Policy Concern**

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## **Healthcare Policy Concern**

### **Introduction**

Healthcare policy concerns are among the crucial aspects for legislators, particularly in the United States. The lawmakers give a concise summary of health policy challenges, the health effects of these problems, and how to resolve them. Pollack Porter et al. (2018) indicated that progress in legislation has improved the likelihood of achieving the greatest milestones of a nation's public health. Diverse issues may be resolved through healthcare reform. This paper offers an outline of healthcare policy, an identified issue, and its solution.

### **Overview of Healthcare Policy**

Healthcare policy entails actions, plans, and decisions carried out to attain certain goals in health care within society. The various goals achieved through healthcare policy include establishing the expected roles and priorities of varied groups and defining a vision for the future (University of Texas, 2018). The decisions regarding healthcare policies are made by Congress at the federal level and also by healthcare institutions. Healthcare policy implications for the nursing profession include nurses' ability to analyze and evaluate policies, advise policymakers, acting as lobbyists to advocate for change, and, more importantly, develop, propose and implement new policies (University of Texas, 2018). Besides, healthcare policy provides nurses with the avenue to research public healthcare issues and prepare health policy briefs.

In the same way, advocacy plays a crucial role and has a substantial impact on healthcare policy. The primary roles of advocacy include protecting patients and developing empathy towards them (Davoodvand et al., 2016). The impact of advocacy on healthcare policy includes practitioners' ability to influence healthcare agencies and legislators to spearhead changes that will enhance care. Pollack Porter et al. (2018) examined that practitioners' advocacy efforts

enhance the generation of policy-relevant results by sharing useful data for policy debates. Besides, the advocacy role is aligned with the duties of advanced nursing practice. Davoodvand et al. (2016) affirmed that nursing organizations emphasized that nursing advocacy is among advanced nursing care procedures. Advanced practice nurses' responsibilities are manifested in their advanced knowledge of providing protection, information, and resources, which are consistent with the advocacy role of patient protection and empathy.

### **Selected Healthcare Policy Concern**

The chosen healthcare policy concern is the opioid pandemic, which is experienced in the United States. In the past, the acceleration of opioid usage was associated with the surge in opioid pain medication and prescription drugs (Alexander et al., 2018). However, the existing measures to curb the opioid crisis have proven ineffective since they only minimised prescription. The increase in opioid usage in recent years has shifted from prescription drugs to illicit ones. Alexander et al. (2018) examined that recently, the supply of illegally manufactured opioids and heroin has increased in the United States.

Many people experience chronic pain and go to seek expert help. After using opioids to manage their pain, they sometimes go onto a road of addiction. Addiction knows no bounds. Pregnant women still continue using opioids despite knowing the harmful repercussions it would have on their unborn children. Addiction leads to crime and prostitution because drug users cannot cope without the drugs. They do whatever it takes to get their next fix. There have been so many incidents where drug addicts have killed people as they try to get their fix. Drug addicts through morality out of the window. They cannot think straight or function normally without their usual fix of the drug of their choice. Those who engage in prostitution wind up getting

raped or abused. Such experiences can take a toll on them mentally. They also risk contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Many drug addicts have winded up homeless after getting fired due to poor work performance. Most addicts wind up selling all their possessions in order to maintain their drug habit. Eventually, they end up homeless, which makes them vulnerable to rape, violence, sicknesses and many more dangers. Their mental health is affected. What is more, they acquire diseases such as HIV/AIDS due to the sharing of needles. Drug dealers manufacture opioids for themselves by putting certain additives which are harmful. Research showed that whenever reports of a person dying due to overdose surfaced, the demand for the drug rose as well as the price. The bodies of addicts become used to the drugs after a span of time of constant drug abuse. They look for something stronger in order to get their “high”. This is what mostly leads to overdoses.

Therefore, the opioid crisis is a crucial healthcare policy concern, which requires a different approach. Besides, the population group that is significantly impacted by the opioid crisis comprises African Americans. Alexander et al. (2018) affirmed that the upsurge in opioid mortality among blacks could be attributed to the affordability and availability of illicit heroin and its potency. Therefore, African Americans are highly impacted by the opioid pandemic.

### **Comprehensive Description of Opioid Crisis**

The frequency of opioid-related overdose and deaths is higher among African Americans than the Whites at the community level. The opioid overdose rate among the Black Americans in Chicago between 2015 and 2016 was 56% higher than that of the Whites (James & Jordan, 2018). The high disparity indicates the substantial impact of the opioid crisis on African Americans. A similar high disparity regarding opioid overdose was exhibited in Washington

D.C, which contains a lesser blacks population. James and Jordan (2018) examined that Black Americans in Washington accounted for 79% of the opioid-related mortality in 2016. The black community exhibits high rates of opioid overdose due to the easy accessibility to illicit drugs.

Besides, the increased opioid crisis has a devastating impact on the Black community and population at large. The opioid crisis has a negative impact on the social life of the African American communities. Griffith et al. (2018) posited that the government undertook the approach of detaining the drug addicts rather than assisting them, which has led to the separation of families. The opioid crisis has also led to health and mortality impacts on the black population. The opioid-related death rates are high among African Americans since they have been sidelined regarding opiate addiction treatment (Griffith et al., 2018). The opioid crisis has also escalated the health conditions that have a substantial impact on minority communities. Liver and kidney failure, which already impact the Black population, are escalated by opioid dependence. Therefore, the opioid crisis has a significant impact on African Americans.

Black people and other minorities have often been discriminated against. The rates of unemployment tend to be higher amongst black people as opposed to white people. Most young black people tend to look up to drug dealers when growing up. Drug dealers tend to live a lavish lifestyle that young folks admire and desire. As such, they participate in the drug trade in order to improve their standards of living. They wind up consuming the merchandise and living wayward lifestyles, which affect their health.

### **Student-Identified Solution to the Opioid Crisis**

#### **Description of the Solution**

The proposed solution is aimed at reducing the usage of illicit heroin and fentanyl among African Americans rather than focusing on reducing prescription drugs. The solution contains

two recommended approaches to be undertaken. The first recommended approach is to advocate for reforms in the criminal justice system by shifting it from public safety to public health.

Wennerstrom et al. (2020) examined that the prisoner to the patient initiative aims to address the disparities that arise from incarceration. The high incarceration rate among African Americans regarding drug addiction ought to have reduced opioid overdose among the population.

However, the high rates of opioid usage among blacks indicate that prisons' correlation centers are ineffective. The proposed initiative ensures that individuals who transition from prison are provided with care for illnesses (Wennerstrom et al., 2020). The prisoner to patient approach will enhance the integration between officials of the criminal justice system and official of public healthcare. There will be a streamlined transition of offenders from prison to community healthcare facilities.

The second approach of the solution entails developing a community-led holistic needs assessment. The assessment is accompanied by routine check-ins with the impacted population to evaluate the social determinants that enhance opioid overdose. Chau (2020) ascertained that first-hand information from the community regarding worship, play, learning, working, as well as the residents of the people and how such factors impact health functioning, is essential. Such facets are crucial in developing appropriate treatment plans and community-based strategies for assisting opioid addicts. As Chau (2020) examined, the assessment should include the implicit and explicit community leaders, the people that opioid addicts trust, and their source of information. The holistic approach will ensure that a community-based initiative is created, which involves the residents, family members, and community leaders to minimize the opioid crisis by assisting the African American addicts. The community is made up of family, friends and neighbors. They provide a support system for a recovering addict and folks who were

incarcerated. They offer them hope, encouragement and, most importantly, hold them accountable. This makes them to continue on the right track. In essence, integration of the two approaches, reforms in the critical justice system and the holistic assessment approach, are crucial in the implementation of a solution to the opioid crisis exhibited by African Americans.

### **Positive Outcome of the Solution**

In essence, the positive implication of the proposed solution entails minimization of the opioid addicts among African Americans. The prisoner to patient initiative will enhance adherence of the addicts to treatment approaches since the stigma associated with incarceration will be minimized. As Wennerstrom et al. (2020) examined, incarcerated individuals experience high rates of health-related disparities as compared to the general population. The complications arise from the stigma associated with prison, which renders the correction centers ineffective. Therefore, transforming the treating of the inmates as patients rather than prisoners will enhance their adherence to the opioid crisis intervention. On the other hand, the holistic needs assessment will assist in identifying the social determinants that influence opioid overdose among African Americans. The health and well-being of residents are impacted by neighborhood safety, economic stability, and community safety (Chau, 2020). Obtaining the determinants of an opioid overdose at the grassroots will ensure that appropriate treatment interventions are offered to the addicted African Americans rather than subjecting them to general treatment. Therefore, the identified social aspects are crucial in addressing the opioid misuse crisis among the black community.

### **Changes in the Community and Population Group to Foster Implementation**

Changes at the community level involve the integration of opioid overdose treatment into the mainstream healthcare system. Treating opioid misuse as a normal condition will change the

perception of the community members towards the addicts. Abuse and Office of the Surgeon General (2016) ascertained that obstacles to successful care coordination have been enhanced by the separation of treatment of disorders associated with substance use from mainstream care. Therefore, integrating the two systems in the community minimizes stigmatization of the addicts and encourages more members to adhere to the intervention.

Changes in the black population group, on the other hand, include honesty among the addicts and family support. The blacks who are addicted to opioid usage should be honest with themselves and seek the treatment intervention rather than ignoring the initiative. Most of the addicts visit care facilities for other issues rather than their disorder (Abuse & Office of the Surgeon General, 2016). The minimization of stigma at the community level, through the changes and reforms at the criminal justice system, should encourage more African Americans with addiction disorders to seek intervention. Therefore, it is up to the addicted blacks to rise and seek medical attention rather than fearing the associated stigma.

### **Measurable Actions for Demonstration of a Positive Outcome**

The primary measurable outcomes from the proposed solution include adherence to the community-based intervention, incarceration rates, as well as the rate of recovery from addiction. The community-based assessment is aimed at eliminating the social determinants that enhance addictions and encourage more members to join the intervention. The success of such an intervention is determined by the number of blacks who adhere to the initiative. Besides, the number of opioid-addiction incarcerations after implementation of the solution is a significant measurable outcome. A positive outcome is signified by fewer African Americans been incarcerated. In addition, the positive outcome can be recognized through the identification of the African Americans who have recovered from the solution.

## **Challenges to Implementation of Proposed Solution**

The two challenges to the implementation of the intervention are mistrust among the African American addicts and family perceptions. Addicted individuals perceive that people do not care about them due to trust issues (Chau, 2020). Such mistrust among the addicted individuals can be eliminated by utilizing familiar individuals, who the addicts can trust, as pioneers of the intervention. Addicts have often let down their family members over and over again. They have trampled on their trust by manipulating them to sustain their drug-using habits. It is very difficult to build trust once it is broken. Drug addicts often hurt and take advantage of those who are dear to them. It so often leads to separation, divorce, and so much more. Building trust takes time, effort and sacrifice. As these addicts' reform and integrate into society, they need to persevere and be patient.

On the other hand, family perception arises from the fact that members do not believe in the recovery of the addicts. Such a point of view hinders the family members from providing the required support in the intervention. Such perceptions are detrimental to the motivation and self-esteem of a person who is making efforts to take the right path of recovery. Family should offer hope instead of despair. They should offer encouragement and motivation. More often than not, they offer discouragement consciously and subconsciously. The challenge can be eliminated through prior awareness for family members regarding the intervention's effectiveness in reversing the addiction.

### **Elected Official**

The selected elected official is Senator Charles Schumer of the United States Senate. The people of New York elected Charles Schumer to represent them in the United States Senate. The senator's choice is based on the fact that he has pioneered health policy reforms regarding opioid

addiction. Senator Schumer introduced legislation to sanction traffickers and laboratories that were responsible for exporting fentanyl into America (Balsamo, 2019). He also introduced the Providing Officers with Electronic Resources Act (POWER Act) that would authorize the Department of Justice to create a grant program. This grant program would help various jurisdictions obtain funds to purchase equipment to screen contraband smuggled into the United States at the border (Bradley, 2018). The senator has also been very instrumental in the passing of the Opioid Crisis Response Act that sought to elaborately address the full continuum of addiction prevention and treatment in all populations (Hodge et al., 2018). Therefore, he is the appropriate choice for healthcare concerns.

### **Conclusion**

The opioid crisis is one of the crucial healthcare policy concerns that has substantially impacted African Americans. The high rates among blacks are attributed to the presence of illicit opioids. Opioid overdose among blacks has negatively impacted both their social life and health. The proposed solution for the opioid crisis includes both reforms in the critical justice system to a prisoner to the patient initiative and the holistic community-based assessment. The proposed solution will reduce opioid-related stigma and encourage both the community and family members to support the addicts during the treatment intervention.

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