

# An accredited online curriculum aids frontline prescribers in combating the opioid crisis in Appalachia

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*Rothman Opioid Foundation uses state and federal grants to develop training programs*

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA, UNITED STATES, January 8, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Appalachian Region continues to experience disproportionately higher opioid overdose rates and related fatalities. All medication prescribers and future prescribers in training need enhanced opioid education to prevent addiction and to properly care for patients with Substance Use Disorders (SUD). A Pennsylvania-based non-profit foundation is combating the opioid addiction crisis by educating frontline healthcare professionals with its free, accredited online [Opioids and Pain Management](#) curriculum. Healthcare professional training programs, especially physician assistant (PA) and nurse practitioner (NP) programs, can easily incorporate them into curricula.

"Appalachia is suffering more acutely from the opioid addiction crisis than the rest of the Nation. Physician assistants and nurse practitioners are valued professionals and are often on the frontline of primary care and pain management. They will greatly benefit from formal training in opioid pharmacology, use, abuse, and safe evidenced-based pain management strategies," says Dr. Asif Ilyas, MD, MBA, FACS, President of the non-profit Rothman Orthopaedic Institute Foundation for [Opioid Research](#) and Education (aka, Rothman Opioid Foundation).

The Rothman Opioid Foundation is a leader in opioid-related research and education. Thanks to a three-year grant from the federal Appalachian Regional Commission and support from the Pennsylvania General Assembly, the Foundation has used its expertise to educate healthcare professionals in Pennsylvania and the broader Appalachian Region on evidence-based, opioid-reducing prescribing and use methods.

Opioids and Pain Management is a free, online, self-paced certificate program that easily integrates into the clinical phases of healthcare professionals' training. It presents a series of eight different patient case studies. It includes but is not limited to, opioid prescribing guidelines and indications, pain management alternatives to opioids, identification of potential SUD, and intervention strategies. The curriculum is designed to complement the clinical phase of NP and PA training programs but can be implemented at any stage in students' course of study.

While intended specifically for NP and PA students, the Rothman Opioid Foundation submitted

the course material to a rigorous national accreditation process. As a result, the curriculum has been accredited for up to 13.5 opioid Continuing Medical Education (CME) credit hours. It satisfies the federal Drug Enforcement Agency's 8-hour Medication Assisted Treatment Education (DEA MATE) training requirement on the treatment and management of patients with opioid or other SUD. That means any licensed prescriber, physician, NP, or PA, can obtain required CME or DEA MATE opioid training through this vital course material.

While most opioid-related education currently targets physicians, Ilyas says, NPs and PAs often interact more with individuals who are suffering from or are susceptible to opioid misuse.

"NPs and PAs have prescribing rights. They are vital medical professional team members who need to be educated and recruited in the fight against the opioid addiction crisis across Appalachia," says Ilyas. "This curriculum is tailored specifically to these important healthcare professionals to mitigate the rate of opioid addiction at the source by teaching proper opioid use and early symptoms of misuse to decrease the risk of opioid dependency and abuse."

The Rothman Opioid Foundation is partnering with colleges and universities to distribute the course material to as many students as possible in the Appalachian Region. This project's ultimate goals are to ensure that PAs and NPs have the proper resources and education to advise on proper opioid use and its alternatives, recognize the initial symptoms of opioid misuse and abuse, and understand when and how to intervene when substance abuse occurs.

"The opioid addiction crisis has taken a drastic toll on Appalachia and the country. To lower the chance of misuse and overdose in patients, it is imperative that frontline healthcare professionals are adequately trained and educated in the pathophysiology of opioid addiction, and they have resources available to guide effective and safe pain management," says Ilyas.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 220 Americans die every day from opioid overdose. This includes prescription and illicit opioids. Low-income and rural areas are among the most likely to experience the opioid addiction crisis's adverse effects, as evidenced by data published by the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Rural residents are at greater risk in part due to a lack of resources or healthcare services to address their addiction. These regions often lack accessible health services, especially those considered "specialized" services, such as addiction treatment.

In addition, communities with a high uninsured population are at greater addiction risk as individuals without healthcare insurance are much less likely to receive treatment than those who are insured. These individuals are more likely to seek primary care through an urgent care setting, generally staffed by non-physician healthcare professionals (PAs and NPs). As noted, PAs and NPs have not always received the opioid-related education that their physician counterparts have.

“Therefore, it is essential that professional education, designed to provide physician assistants and nurse practitioners with the tools necessary to both manage pain in an evidenced-based, opioid-sparing manner as well as screen for and identify addiction in the primary care setting visit, is available across Appalachia’s rural regions,” says Ilyas. Rothman Opioid Foundation is committed to providing the educational tools needed by all healthcare professionals across the Appalachian Region as they serve and care for patients on the frontline of the opioid addiction crisis.

While future NPs and PAs are the curriculum’s primary audience, all future and current healthcare professionals will benefit from the training. Additional educational programs will include online webinar series and in-person events when feasible.

About the Rothman Orthopaedic Institute Foundation for Opioid Research and Education.

The Rothman Orthopaedic Institute Foundation for Opioid Research & Education, [www.rothmanopioid.org](http://www.rothmanopioid.org), is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization dedicated to raising awareness of the risks and benefits of opioids, educating physicians/physicians/policymakers on safe opioid use, and supporting research and education aimed to advance innovate pain management strategies that can decrease opioid use. The Foundation supports and advances the highest quality research on opioids and alternative pain modalities to yield findings that can better inform patients, physicians, and the greater healthcare community in the most evidenced-based pain management strategies.

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