



From the Executive Director

It is hard to believe that we are more than halfway through 2024. Fall is one of my favorite seasons of the year, cooler weather, beautiful vibrant colors as the leaves change color ushering in winter, pumpkin spice, and no more lawn mowing. I hope everyone stays safe as the kids go back to school and summer

vacations wrap up. As we enter the busy cough, cold, and flu season, remember to take time and care for yourself both mentally and physically. I challenge everyone to be aware some struggle throughout the year either due to substance use disorder (SUD), loneliness, or mental health issues and I hope you are willing to reach out and offer support during this difficult time for those struggling. If you are missing a loved one or someone close to you, please know that Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP) extends our heartfelt condolences. As those of us in the medical profession are considered essential, we suit up and show up remaining on the front lines during this cough, cold, and flu season, in order to take care of our patient's medical needs. As pharmacists we played and continue to play a vital role as the battle against, flu and other respiratory issues and I am very proud of my chosen profession.

This year OPHP sponsored nine (9) student pharmacists, five (5) from the University of Oklahoma College of Pharmacy (OU) and four (4) from Southwestern Oklahoma State College of Pharmacy (SWOSU), four (4) OPHP participants and two (2) OPHP Board of Director members for a total of fifteen (15) to the annual American Pharmacists Association (APhA) Institute on Substance Use Disorders at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, UT, May 29, 2024 – June 1, 2024. In this issue, each writes of their experience at this Institute often referred to as their "Utah Experience".



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From the Executive Director continued

In this issue, Roy J DuPrez, M.Ed., CEO and founder of Back2Basics a residential treatment center in Flagstaff, AZ has offered an article to our readers “The Importance of Creating Support Groups in Recovery”. OPHP emphasizes the importance of having a solid support network by requiring participants to obtain a 12-step sponsor, contact with an OPHP field monitor, and attendance in a OPHP professional support group as well as 12-step meeting attendance. I hope you enjoy this article.

When a pharmacist, student pharmacist, or pharmacy technician enters the OPHP program and begins their road to personal recovery from a substance use disorder (SUD) and/or co-occurring issue often times the family, friends or colleagues may not understand the vital role they may play in the OPHP participant’s recovery. They may even verbalize that they knew something was wrong but couldn’t identify it and were shocked to find that their loved one, friend or colleague suffered from a SUD or co-occurring issue. In this issue, OPHP will include an article “Identifying the Problem” in hopes of helping loved ones identify the issues in those suffering and what they can do to support their loved ones. Also, it is important for friends, family members, or colleagues to get assistance since they are also impacted by this insidious disease.

OPHP has a free standing website at www.ophp.us Please visit our website to learn more about services OPHP provides the pharmacy profession in regard to assistance with a personal substance use disorder and/or mental health issues. Contact OPHP if you have any questions or need assistance.

Please enjoy the newsletter.



OPHP Helpline:
1-800-260-7574 (statewide)
405-557-5773 (local)

All calls are confidential and OPHP is readily available for help.

I assure you it is the best thing you could do for a family member, friend, colleague or yourself. If there is no legal action the pharmacist or student pharmacist can get the help and treatment they need for their disease and remain anonymous to the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy as long as they comply with the recovery recommendations of OPHP.

The Importance of Creating Support Groups In Recovery

Going through recovery is a challenging endeavor filled with physical, mental and emotional hurdles. One of the best ways to make this process easier is by creating support groups to provide emotional support, advice and to build friendships that can enhance the recovery experience. For those in recovery, creating support groups can be difficult because they often don't feel worthy of having friends or don't want people to know what they are going through. However, by building these relationships those in recovery have a better chance at succeeding. Here are four key reasons why people in recovery should create support groups so they can better their chances at recovery.

Provides emotional support

Emotional support is a big part of recovery. Individuals overcoming addiction often feel alone, hopeless and are ashamed of their past. Support groups provide a safe environment for the person to speak about their struggles with addiction and other aspects of life without judgement. The shared empathy helps ease the loneliness often felt, making recovery a less scary endeavor.

Support group members often express their emotions knowing that other members have had similar experiences. This understanding amongst the group creates a sense of acceptance which is critical when it comes to emotional healing. By having regular interaction with group members, the person will be encouraged in their recovery journey and will help boost their self-esteem.

Provides accountability

Being a part of a support group provides accountability for the person in recovery. Even though the person is doing everything they can to maintain a healthy lifestyle old habits and cravings may still creep in. A support group allows the person to stay accountable on their road to recovery. Other members of the group provide support during the difficult times and help the person stay committed to their recovery routine.

The group helps build responsibility. Knowing that others are checking in on the person's recovery and their progress will motivate the person to stay on the right path. Accountability created in these groups extends outside of them as well as friendships are made, and they learn to not only to hold themselves accountable for their actions but help others in the same way.

Learn through shared experiences

A powerful aspect of support groups is learning from others who have been in the same situation. The core struggles of addiction are often similar and hearing how others have gone through recovery can provide insight into strategies on overcoming different obstacles.

Through sharing stories, group members can see that recovery is possible which builds hope for the individual. Speaking about experiences also provides the opportunity to learn coping mechanisms, develop new skills and be able to identify triggering mechanisms. The knowledge of the entire group will help the individual create and implement effective strategies for their recovery.

Learn tools to succeed

Support groups provide a wealth of knowledge and practical tools for people to use in recovery. These often include counseling, community programs, and treatment options. People in these groups will share experiences about healthcare providers, suggest therapists and other individuals who can help the person overcome their addiction.

Learn tools to succeed

Other tools support groups provide are more tangible. Transportation to meetings, advice on managing their money and help finding a job are common ways support groups can help a person in recovery. This support can help ease some of the day to day worries the person may have that can hinder the recovery process. By using the resources of group members, the person can start building a life they are proud of.

Creating support groups is critical for anyone in the recovery process. The accountability, emotional support and tools learned from others enhances the chance for success. For people in recovery the fact they no longer feel alone and now have supportive, healthy friendships will go a long way while they continue their journey. Support groups will empower people to stay on path and reclaim their lives leading to long lasting sobriety.



Oklahoma Pharmacists
Helping Pharmacists

I encourage any pharmacist or student pharmacist that may be struggling with substance use disorder or any other mental health issue, or if you know a pharmacist or student pharmacist you think may be struggling, to call the OPHP Help Line now.

800-260-7574

Identifying the Problem

Substance Use Disorder is a cunning, baffling, miserable disease. Denial is a major factor involved stopping those with this disease from seeking help for themselves. So often concerned family members, friends and colleagues, express knowledge that a problem exists, but are unable to identify it. The following *Impaired Pharmacist Symptom Inventory* may help to identify the problem, and get them the help that is so readily available before it is too late.

Impaired Pharmacist Symptom Inventory

- Overwork**
- Disorganized schedule
- Spasmodic work pace**
- Unreasonable behavior
- Inaccessible to patients and employer
- Prescription errors**
- Patient complaints
- Frequent absences
- Decreasing workload and tolerance
- Frequent days off for vague reasons
- Taking sexual advantage of coworkers or customers
- Filling illegal prescriptions
- Taking and/or using drugs from pharmacy without follow-up by physician**
- Taking/selling drugs to others or giving them to family or friends
- Often late, absent or ill
- Decreasing work performance
- “Pharmacy Gossip”
- Incommunicative/unavailable
- Alcohol on breath while in pharmacy

**early signs

What do you do if you suspect a colleague has a problem with substance use disorder?

Trust your instincts!!

Call Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP)

immediately OPHP Helpline 800-260-7574

Do not confront alone

Left alone the problem will not go away.

If you or a pharmacist you care about is suffering from substance use disorder

There is a solution

Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists (OPHP)

Is readily available for help

Call the OPHP Helpline 800-260-7574

All calls are confidential.



If you haven't already contributed to OPHP this year, please consider making a tax-deductible contribution. These contributions help OPHP continue to assist and provide scholarships to pharmacists, pharmacy students and pharmacy technicians during the recovery process. Please [click here](#) to make a donation online. For those who have made a contribution this year, please accept our sincere thanks.

UTAH EXPERIENCES

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

1: I have attended four APhA conferences in the past. However, this was my first time attending the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorder (ISUD) and my first time in Salt Lake City, Utah! The ISUD was unlike any other professional conference. This experience was uniquely focused on understanding and destigmatizing substance use disorders. Instead of solely hosting educational seminars, the conference also incorporated several pharmacists who were personally affected by substance use disorder. Those pharmacists offered their experiences and generated a safe space so that many students also shared their life experiences with the disorders affecting their loved ones. The experience was heavy at times, but that only made it more impactful. There were tears, but there was also healing. Everyone's learning went beyond textbooks or guidelines. I believe every student and pharmacist could benefit from attending this conference since these disorders affect our profession from so many different avenues.

2: The 2024 APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders hosted in Salt Lake City, Utah was a truly transformative experience, not only professionally, but also personally. The curriculum provided was robust and delivered with passion, accompanied by moving personal stories from our fellow pharmacists about their own journey with substance use disorder. I left feeling connected with and inspired by my peers; I know that each person at this conference will absolutely make this world a better place. I would recommend this conference to everyone and anyone, especially those with a personal connection to substance use disorder. If allowed, I would attend this conference every year. I could not recommend it more, and I hope everyone that wants to get a chance to be a part of the profound experience that is the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders in Salt Lake City.

3: I would like to first thank Dr. Rich and OPHP for providing me with the opportunity to attend the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders. I can confidently say that this conference had a great impact on my life. I learned many things about substance use disorders that will be beneficial to providing the highest quality of care as a pharmacist. I have also been equipped with new tools to continue to combat the stigma surrounding this disease. I cannot recommend this conference enough and hope to have the opportunity to attend again!

4: Attending the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders was an incredibly valuable experience. The event was well-organized, with expert speakers and engaging discussions that offered valuable insights into the challenges surrounding substance use disorders. Despite how much I learned, the weight of the topic was quite overwhelming and left me feeling a bit depressed. The seriousness of the issues discussed was a lot to think about, but I'm grateful for how it has contributed to my journey. This experience has inspired me to continue exploring resources and to keep learning. I hope that someday I'll be able to share my journey and help others in a meaningful way.

5: I cannot express enough gratitude towards everyone at OPHP for granting me the opportunity to learn about substance abuse disorders at the APhA Institute in Utah. Hearing all the wonderful testimonies of personal and family experiences with the diseases was truly eye opening! The Utah Experience genuinely shows you how this institute has changed the trajectory of their lives for the better, and how to apply the knowledge provided to assist families and friends going through similar struggles. If you could go at least once to the APhA Institute for Substance Abuse Disorders, your life will honestly be changed!

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

6: I would like to thank OPHP for the opportunity to attend this year's 9th annual APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders. As someone who does not have any personal experience with SUD, it was an eye-opening to learn more about how we can help and treat these individuals. My biggest takeaway from this conference was the need to eliminate the stigma around substance abuse. Shame, worthlessness, and powerlessness already play such a large part in these people's lives. As pharmacists, it is our duty to build up these individuals, not tear them down even more. We can continue to pour love into our community by reminding individuals with substance use that they are worth our time and effort.

7: The APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders was nothing like I imagined it would be, and I mean that in the best way possible. When first applying for the scholarship to attend the conference in Utah, I had no idea that I was going to be immersed in an environment filled with so many people who have a true passion for helping those suffering from the disease of addiction. The conference was set up in a way that encourages everyone attending to feel safe and comfortable while talking about such a difficult topic, and I am extremely thankful I got the chance to meet so many incredible people throughout the process. I truly believe the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders has made me a better person and will greatly impact me as a pharmacist in the future as I hope to encourage those around me to understand the disease of addiction. I would gladly attend this conference again if possible, and I would encourage anybody considering attending to apply for the scholarship because you will not regret it. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to learn so much at the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders while also enjoying the beautiful state of Utah with some amazing individuals.

8: I attended the Spring 2024 Substance Use Disorder Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am a second-year pharmacy student, and I expected this conference to be purely academic. I expected the seminar speakers to discuss the causes and effects of substance use disorder. I did not expect to experience the emotions that come with surrounding yourself with recovering pharmacists. They shared their thoughts and experiences. They shared their road to recovery which included any repercussions that came with being on an illicit substance. They shared how their families were impacted and how it made them feel. This was not what I was expecting, and I was able to learn so much about substance use disorder. I learned that there is a stereotype surrounding substance use disorder. Many people assume that individuals struggling are scoring drugs off of the street and that they are poor and uneducated. During this conference, I learned that this is not the case at all. Many of the speakers were or are practicing pharmacists who have a doctorate. This truly opened my eyes and made me rethink how I approach patients. It made me realize that no one is immune to the addictive and devastating nature of substance use. It can affect anyone, and it does not differentiate based on demographics or finances. Overall, I am grateful to the Oklahoma Pharmacists Helping Pharmacists for giving me this opportunity to learn and grow.

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

9: Thank you for the opportunity to attend APHA Institute on Substance Abuse Disorder. It was such a great experience to be with others who understand this disease, and its effects not only on those who suffer from it, but also friends and families of those who suffer. As a family member, it has been a difficult road watching loved ones suffer from addictions. This conference provided so much information on Substance Abuse Disorders, talking about physiological effects, psychological effects, and different treatment plans and recovery options. We were given the opportunity to attend 3 different recovery groups, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Al-Anon. These groups allowed others to share their experiences with these cunning and baffling diseases. School did not prepare me for this path at all. Living with this disease has shown me just how little those in pharmacy, and in other medical professions understand about addictions, unless they are personally affected. Again, I say thank you.

10: I would like to start off by saying thank you to Dr. Rich and OPHP for the opportunity to attend the APhA substance use disorder conference in Salt Lake City, UT. I can truly say I've learned so many things not only from a student perspective, but from an empathetic perspective as well. Before attending the conference, I already had that space in my heart for those suffering from any kind of substance or alcohol use disorder, but this conference pulled on heart strings I didn't know could be pulled. There were laughs, tears, and a lot of vulnerability which ultimately showed me it's okay to not be okay, but there is always someone there in a time of need and to use those proper resources such as Dr. Rich and OPHP. I will be attending next year!

11: My time in Utah...

This event was full of many firsts for me: my first APhA meeting, my first time in Utah, and my first Substance Use Disorder seminar and, to me, training. I went in completely unaware of how the mountains and the seminar would impact at my core. Being selected to sit on the board of OPHP has been an honor I do not take lightly. I felt it my duty to attend the Utah meeting so I could have a better understanding of SUD. I wanted to better comprehend what people go through during the throws of substance use. I wanted to see and hear success stories. I wanted what we all want: Hope. Boy, did I get all of the above.

During the conference, I was shocked to hear how resilient the human body is. The shock at quantities people can consume and survive was paramount. The lies they live and breathe to their friends and family amazed me. What amazed me most was the turning point for the survivors – most lost everything but refused to give up on sobriety.

This spirit of resilience inspired me most. The hike up the mountain, or most of the mountain for me, mirrored the determination of every survivor. Once at the peak, the view was worth every hard and labored step. It embodied the spirit of the conference; the mountain had to be climbed.

What affected me most were the meetings: the raw, emotional meetings of survivors and their loved ones were difficult to bear. Drugs, alcohol, gambling, whatever the crutch, impacted so many more than the abuser. It reminded me of some of the hurdles my own family has overcome. Addiction bleeds into so many lives – none of us are left unscathed.

I will take the experiences and knowledge that I gleaned from my time in Utah and hopefully be a better, fuller contributor to the board and people that I serve.

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

12: Attended the APhA Utah School this year. Not my first time and enjoyed seeing friends and meeting others. Is a great opportunity to network with other professionals engaged in helping people in recovery. Highly recommend interns and pharmacists attend even if they have no experience with addiction.

13: OPHP had been encouraging me to attend the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorders in Salt Lake City Utah for many years. Even though I had an interest, I always made something else a priority and never attended until it became a requirement of my agreed order with the Oklahoma State Board of Pharmacy. Honestly, this requirement felt like a punishment, and I was not excited about the trip. Fortunately, I have learned acceptance will usually get me through the pain of doing something I did not want to do. I got to Salt Lake City and quickly noticed that it was a nice city to visit. I could get anywhere I wanted to go by a public rail system. I never felt unsafe, and the city seemed remarkably clean. I had some time to sightsee before the conference and learn a little about the history of the city. I really did not know what to expect about the conference itself. I knew there would be pharmacists in recovery and college students in attendance. What I quickly experienced was I not only gained tools to help me in my own recovery, but also tools to help me professionally. My definition of sobriety has always been no mind-altering chemicals for myself. The conference opened my eyes to the reality that there are a lot of people dying from fentanyl overdoses and harm reduction has a place helping some individuals with opiate use disorder. My best friend recently died of a fentanyl overdose. Had I attended the conference before his death I might have been able to suggest some options that possible could have prevented his death. Not only did I gain lots of new knowledge about substance use disorders, but I also completed most of my continuing education for the year! Another benefit I saw from this conference was the number of college students in attendance. OPHP had provided scholarships for eight college students! These students could hear from individuals in recovery and professionals working every day in the substance use disorder field. Hopefully, this gave them knowledge and insight to be able help their patients. Earlier I said I thought I was being punished by the Board of Pharmacy. By the end of the conference, my perspective had changed. Even though it is their job to protect the public, they also care enough about pharmacists to give them every opportunity (like the Utah experience) to be successful in recovery. For that I am grateful.

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

14: I sat in the airport. The anxiety I was feeling over this trip had dissipated. This was my third time attending the Institute but first time attending as PharmD graduate. This also was the first time attending with a suspended pharmacist license. I felt mostly over the shame and embarrassment that my diversion of controlled substances had brought me. I've been in recovery for substance use disorder for eight years now. I know that I am a better person for it. My current biggest struggle concerns spirituality. Although I have made strides in that area there is still work that needs to be done.

I arrived in Salt Lake City Tuesday at midnight. I'm exhausted. Fortunately, the institute did not begin until the afternoon the next day. I stayed in the dorms and was pleasantly surprised that they were an upgrade from the dorms on my last trips to the institute. I unpack, get things situated in my room, and then go to bed.

The next morning, I woke up early enough to spend some time walking around the University of Utah campus. The University campus is beautiful: very green, hilly, and surrounded by mountains. Honestly, staying at the campus was worth the trip itself. I was filled with a calming sense of nature and found myself reminded that beauty exists all around us.

The institute began with a general overview of what to expect. Certainly, some of the talks would be useful for the practice of pharmacy and be like other CE conferences, this conference would also be significantly different. Substance use disorder impacts those that suffer from the disease in a much different way than other disease states. Disease presentation is often seen via physical and/or mental symptoms. Like other disease states substance use disorder has physical and mental symptoms, unlike other disease states it has spiritual symptoms. Spiritual symptoms such as replacement of sense of purpose or meaning in life with a drug of abuse. Physical and mental symptoms may be treated with medication, spiritual symptoms require different forms of treatment.

A few talks focused on the treatment of physical and mental symptoms, providing very valuable insight into the effects of substance use disorder and what pharmacists may do to help those that struggle. These lectures helped to create a basic level of understanding about substance use disorder before moving into more in depth and personal examples of the disease state.

A few talks focused on the treatment of the spiritual symptoms of substance use disorder. These were most impactful to me. I have struggled with substance abuse for about fifteen years and have been in active recovery for eight years. I have been alcohol free since 2016. I am sober from all drugs of abuse since June of 2023. Along with substance use disorder I also have major depressive disorder. I went to inpatient treatment two separate times with stays of ninety and sixty days respectively. I have worked through the twelve steps of recovery once with a sponsor.

Twelve step groups such as AA is one form of spiritual treatment for substance use disorder. Reinforced in the lectures was the idea of addiction as isolation. The user and the drug. The user does whatever it takes to get the drug regardless of the consequences. Following this line of thinking, if addiction is isolation, then the opposite is connection. This is the importance of recovery-oriented groups in the treatment of substance use disorder. The sharing of stories, of experience in addition is powerful. As one of the speakers shared their personal experience with substance use disorder, I found myself relating to several aspects. The powerlessness, the helplessness, and the overwhelming feelings of shame were emotions I felt in basically the exact same manner as the speaker. This is the connection between sufferers of substance use disorder that 12 step groups are effective in treating. I felt relieved to hear that success story of the speaker in their battle for recovery. It filled me with hope that I accomplish and recover just as they had. In struggling with substance use disorder I often felt I was suffering in the dark, however, hearing others' stories, sharing and connecting with other sufferers, is a light that allows me to find my way out of the darkness.

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

14 (continued) Thursday evening, I participated in a hike near the campus. Climbing the mountain, I am reminded of a line in song about a chocolate factory, “if you want to view paradise, simply look around and view it.” The scenery that evening made that easier to understand. It was a reminder of perception. My perception has a strong impact on the way I feel and interact with the world. For example, one perception is the hike was tough, I got rocks in my shoes, and it hurt when I slid on gravel more than once. Another perception, the air feels good in my lungs, the sun feels good on my skin, the exercise feels good to my muscles, and wow, what a view from the top. I can look at my substance use disorder, my depression, and my recovery and be annoyed, frustrated, and ashamed or I can look at my substance use disorder, my depression, and my recovery and be grateful, proud, and humbled. At least for now I will choose the latter.

There are a couple different aspects of the APhA Institute on Substance Use Disorder that are worth the trip alone. If substance use disorder affects one’s life in any way, there is much to gleam from the experience. From gaining a foundational understanding of substance use disorders physical and mental effects, gaining a deeper understanding of the ripple effect of substance use disorders, hiking, and gaining a complete understand of the spiritual effects of substance use disorder there is something very powerful in the Utah Experience. In addition to the continuing education lectures, there were open twelve step groups. Many of the attendees shared personal experiences they may or may not have ever told anyone else. The roots of substance use disorders grow like weeds, devouring whatever energy source in the way. It was cathartic and powerful to hear these stories.

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UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

15: I was super grateful to be able to attend this year's APHA Institute on Substance Use Disorders in Salt Lake City, UT, and want to thank OPHP for picking up the registration for the conference for my wife and I. I have been before, but it had been about 18 years since I've been. While some things about "The Utah Experience" have changed, the core reason why I went has remained the same. That reason is to enhance my own personal recovery and to freely share my experiences with others in a setting which feels safe and non-judgmental. The biggest thing I noticed which had changed is no other health disciplines where there like they were when I went in 2006. However, this was a huge ADVANTAGE in that it provided for more intimate connections and sharing amongst the attendees. I am grateful that APHA continued the "U of U" for pharmacists, pharmacy students, and those heading state PRN programs.

There is still a long way to go in breaking the stigma surrounding people with substance use disorders (SUD's). The Institute did a great job of teaching about SUD being a disease just like any other disease. I particularly liked the information about opioid use disorder and the medications used to treat it. I have encountered other pharmacists who have personal bias against MAT for OUD. Indeed I have also found people in 12 step programs who think MAT is "just substituting one drug for another." I now have the data on how MAT saves lives and improves outcomes for people. We don't criticize type 2 diabetics for being on "Metformin Maintenance". Why should we think that someone who has OUD and is on "Methadone Maintenance" should be any different? These people are not "using" they are only trying to slowly taper and get their lives back in order without having to deal with being "dopesick" Having experienced "dope sickness" before myself, I understand WHY people go back to using. It can be VERY uncomfortable for both the body and the mind. Let's give these people a chance to not have to deal as much with intense withdrawal, let their mind, body, and spirit heal, and THEN think about a taper. I've learned from many sources that it takes AT LEAST a year for your brain to heal from opioid use disorder, and thus people may be on MAT for multiple years. Some stay on it for life, because it keeps their disease at bay. I know people who have been clean for years, but are still on the lowest dose of Suboxone. This has allowed this person to go from being a high school drop-out, to a legal assistant, and now to work in the field of substance abuse. I also enjoyed the part talking about naloxone use and raising awareness. Personally, I have been carrying naloxone for right at 2 years. Not for me, but for those I may come into contact with who may need it. I started doing this after a recovery friend stated that he found someone at work with a needle in their arm and could do nothing about it. Being that I attend NA meetings, there are always people coming in who may be new and currently detoxing from an opioid. These people may be prime candidates to return to using. I pray that I never NEED to use it, but I am grateful that we have a medication that can potentially give someone another chance at life. Again, I have encountered pharmacists who think that naloxone only enables people to keep using. One time, even prior to the Institute, I asked them to think about it in a different way: That being, that a person gets another chance at living and actually getting help with their addiction/mental health. Who knows what that person may become and HOW MANY MORE people they may be able to reach by sharing their experience, or what other contribution they may be able to make to the world. Look at Robert Downey Jr's story. Remarkable turnaround. I understand that other's experiences with addiction/mental health issues can shape their beliefs about the subject, but if I want to see

UTAH EXPERIENCES continued

STUDENT PHARMACISTS, OPHP PARTICIPANTS, OPHP BOARD MEMBERS

15: continued Another thing that I got so much out of was when we broke into small groups, and I was able to freely share my story of recovery. I don't think that anyone else in my small group had been personally affected by SUD, but I could tell from the pain in their eyes and the questions they were asking that SOMEONE'S disease had an effect on them. Indeed, addiction affects the whole family, not just the one drinking or using. I heard several of the students share openly, honestly, and emotionally about how other people's SUD's had an effect on their lives. So many people's experiences have shaped their lives, and thus their passions about helping others who may have SUD. I met a former student, now 1st year resident, share a lot of her story with me about her father and his battles with SUD. She is going to go a long way in this because of her passion, compassion, and tenacity for those affected by SUD. Thank you for being such a ray of sunshine and positivity as well as for your passion for helping those affected by SUD.

Being in recovery myself, it was refreshing that there were open meetings for AA, NA, and Al-Anon. While these were not new to me, I think they were for many of the attendees especially students. I felt this was a time of personal healing for those whose family members, friends, or other acquaintances have been affected by SUD. Indeed, there were several who have lost people to this disease. Thankfully, when these people were at their most vulnerable in speaking about this, there were caring, helpful people there that would talk them through it. This and the small group experience above, both left me emotionally drained at the end of the day. This is much the same way that I felt at the end of the day when I was in treatment 20 plus years ago, and that ended up being one of the things which saved my life. Hearing some of the things others have faced, gave me strength to face difficult times in my own recovery.

I also enjoyed the presentation from the SLC ER Pharmacist. While I knew there were lots of different drugs out there, I had no idea there were so many things I had never heard of. I also learned that fentanyl test strips only confirm whether there is fentanyl in something. Carfentanil can be in a drug and have a negative test for fentanyl, something I hadn't really thought of. There is so much fentanyl, xylazine, and other adulterants out there. Using any illegal substance not from a pharmacy is literally playing Russian roulette.

I also got the chance to meet other people who are actively involved in their states' PRN program. I had met and/or heard some of the speakers before. I had heard Nancy from TN speak at something APHA related earlier in the year. I got a chance to talk with Caitlin from KS talk about their state's program when we toured the beautiful Red Butte Gardens as a group. I got to meet Ed from Oregon and ask him a question about some of the ways they do things in Oregon's program. I also asked him a question that is (as of now) more specific to Oregon and Colorado, and ways that are legal there to aid those with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

In wrapping up, I got SO MUCH MORE from the experience that I had hoped for. I got to meet new people, see people I had not seen in close to 10-15 years, commit more to my program of recovery, and to leave Utah a better person for it. I hope to have brought some of that same mojo back from Utah to share with my professional and recovery friends here in Oklahoma. If you've never been, I HIGHLY encourage you to go. There is NO OTHER conference that I have been to that is as relaxed, informal, and personal as this one. I look forward to attending again one day.