

Lecture and Breakout Session Lesson Plan with Teaching Notes

Description: This lesson plan addresses the role of corporate actors in the opioid crisis drawing on public documents held in the collections of the Opioid Industry Documents Archive (OIDA). The lecture introduces students to the opioid crisis and its unequal impacts, and then proceeds to investigate how corporate interests played a pivotal role in it using a set of well-established tactics. The lecture draws on the conceptual framework of the commercial determinants of health as defined by the World Health Organization, to understand the role of corporate interests in shaping the opioid crisis and health overall.

The activity below is for a 30-minute breakout session to be used in conjunction with the lecture provided in the Teaching Toolkit (45-50-minute or 20-minute versions, depending on time available). The breakout session draws on original documents held in the OIDA, investigative journalism drawing on the collection and scholarship on the opioid crisis and on the commercial determinants of health to develop a deeper understanding of the corporate strategies deployed by the opioid industry. The activity also provides an opportunity for learners to develop strategies to limit and prevent harms that have been brought about by the opioid industry. This activity has been pilot tested with medical students at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

Level: Undergraduate and Graduate

Learning Objectives:

At the end of the lecture learners will be able to:

1. Describe the origins and current scope of the opioid crisis in the U.S.
2. Describe the role of structural racism in the unequal impacts of the opioid crisis
3. Discuss the role of corporations involved in the manufacturing, distribution and marketing of opioid pharmaceuticals in propelling the crisis
4. Define the concept of commercial determinants of health and its role in shaping health and apply it to the opioid crisis

At the end of the breakout session learners will be able to:

1. Identify specific corporate tactics used in the marketing “playbook” by corporations to enhance sales to the detriment of public health
2. Describe the long-lasting impacts of these tactics on the contemporary landscape of the opioid crisis in the U.S.
3. Identify strategies that can limit further harms in this crisis as well as prevent similar future crises

Prereading:

Required

Rich & Ovalle [Overdoses soared even as prescription pain pills plunged](#) Washington Post, September 12, 2023

Lacy-Nichols, J., Marten, R., Crosbie, E., & Moodie, R. (2022). [The public health playbook: ideas for challenging the corporate playbook](#). *The Lancet Global Health*, 10(7), e1067-e1072.

OIDA documents:

- 1) <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/opioids/docs/#id=mhlg0241>
- 2) <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/opioids/docs/#id=lryh0257> (introduction only)
- 3) <https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/opioids/docs/#id=hxhk0255>

Optional:

Kornfield, M. [Inside the sales machine of the 'kingpin' of opioid makers](#). Washington Post, May 11, 2022.

Procedure:

Students will receive required and optional prereading. They will also have participated in the lecture (longer or shorter format). After the lecture presentation students will be divided into small groups. Size of the groups depends on the number of facilitators available. The maximum size of these groups should not exceed a standard discussion or lab section for a course (~25 students). The following prompts can be used to stimulate discussion. Instructors should allot 10 minutes per prompt.

Prompts for discussion:

- 1) In reviewing the documents from the Opioid Industry Document Archive, what are some of the strategies that corporations have used to promote product sales and generate profits? What concerns do these strategies raise? For health professional students in particular: What do you think of the strategies to influence clinician behavior? Have you encountered any similar tactics in your healthcare experience thus far, including in areas other than opioids?
- 2) Look at the two maps in the Rich & Ovalle article from the Washington Post. What do you notice about the distribution of pills and overdoses? What lessons can you draw from these maps and the Washington Post article about the influence of corporations on the current opioid crisis?
- 3) Drawing on Lacy-Nichols et al (2022), think about the strategies you can use to understand and respond to potential corporate influence on clinical decision making and public health. This can entail individual action or suggestions for systemic/policy changes. What might be some avenues to move these actions forward? [Note: instructors can use this discussion to generate a broader set of strategies drawing on the article and on the students' suggestions on a physical or virtual board to share with all students in the discussion group. Instructors can build on this for future exercises, such as for developing health policy proposals and/or health advocacy assignment.]