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Gwendolyn E. Warren  
*UVM College of Medicine*

Jia Xin Jessica Huang  
*UVM College of Medicine*

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# Evaluating Access and Barriers to Mindfulness Among Opioid- Dependent Patients in Bangor, Maine

Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC) Family Medicine Center &  
Residency

**GWENDOLYN WARREN**

**COLLABORATOR: JIA XIN JESSICA HUANG**

**DECEMBER 2015 – JANUARY 2016**

**PROJECT MENTOR: JESSICA BLOOM-FOSTER, MD**

# Problem Identification & Description of Need

- ▶ The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2014) states that “4.8 million people have used heroin at some point in their lives.” In the past 12 months, “212,000 people aged 12 or older used heroin for the first time...[and] 1.4 million people used prescription painkillers non-medically for the first time.”<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ According to the Maine Office of Substance Abuse, the number of people seeking treatment for opioid addiction increased from 1,115 in 2010 to 3,463 in 2014.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ The EMMC Family Medicine Center & Residency Program in Bangor, Maine has approximately 200 opioid-dependent patients on buprenorphine (Suboxone® or Subutex®)
- ▶ In addition to methadone and buprenorphine, studies have shown that mindfulness practices can help prevent relapse.<sup>2</sup>
- ▶ Providers at the Family Medicine Center & Residency Program have introduced mindfulness techniques to their opioid-dependent patients. It will help practitioners to gauge the awareness and interest in mindfulness practices. If practitioners could identify specific barriers to accessing mindfulness resources they could better assist their patient population by developing targeted interventions.

# Public Health Costs

- ▶ Drug addiction affects everyone since “[o]pioid abusers have direct health care costs...approximately 8 times higher than those of nonabusers.”<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Treatment and rehabilitation facilities have been forced to close due to loss of state funding, leaving those who seek treatment for addiction with nowhere to go. Portland, just a 2 hour drive from Bangor, is Maine’s largest city. A short-term residential detox facility in Portland had to turn away 113 people in just 1 month because all beds were full.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Portland Mayor Michael Brennan has been presented with a \$2 million plan to help steer addicts toward treatment rather than jail.<sup>1</sup> Maine spends \$72 million on drug treatment throughout the state; however, rather than increase spending on treatment, Gov. Paul LePage wants to increase funding for drug enforcement. He has even mentioned activating the Maine Army National Guard.<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ No matter what approach is taken to address this public health problem, whether it be aimed at prevention, law enforcement, or treatment, it is going to require significant financial resources.
- ▶ In addition to the financial burden, drug addiction is fueling crime. Over 90% of robberies in Portland, Maine are drug-related.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Finally, there is the immeasurable pain and loss felt by the family and friends of those who lose their lives to drug addiction. Maine set a state record for overdose deaths: 208 in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

# Community Perspective

- ▶ **Paula Codrington, LCSW who provides counseling for opioid-dependent patients**
  - ▶ “I practice mindfulness every day. I think I have to in order to fully be there for my patients.”
  - ▶ “Mindfulness is being in this moment. I think it can help prevent relapse since relapse is not being aware, or not being grateful in the moment.”
- ▶ **Anonymous Patient, currently taking Subutex® replacement therapy**
  - ▶ “What are obstacles that make it difficult for me to practice mindfulness? No quiet place, my living situation, my lack of stuff (my apartment was robbed and I only have a phone), no time, stress, life...”
  - ▶ “I think mindfulness can help prevent relapse because it's another form of expression. Drug use is a crutch for people to avoid facing problems and mindfulness is being aware.”

# Intervention & Methodology

Goal: collect data from current buprenorphine users about their awareness and access to mindfulness techniques in order to identify barriers. Data from surveys will be used in a grant proposal to increase access to mindfulness as a way to aid relapse prevention.

## ▶ Methodology:

- ▶ IRB exemption approval (submit application including anonymous survey tool & project proposal statement)
- ▶ Have providers distribute anonymous survey tool to all buprenorphine patients in the practice over the course of 1 week
- ▶ Analyze collected data
- ▶ Interview consented providers & patients in the practice

## ▶ Intervention:

- ▶ Present data to providers at EMMC Family Medicine Center & Residency
- ▶ Project mentor to utilize data to identify specific barriers to mindfulness practices in a grant proposal
- ▶ Propose future projects or interventions based on identified needs

# Results

N = 22

Of the individuals surveyed:

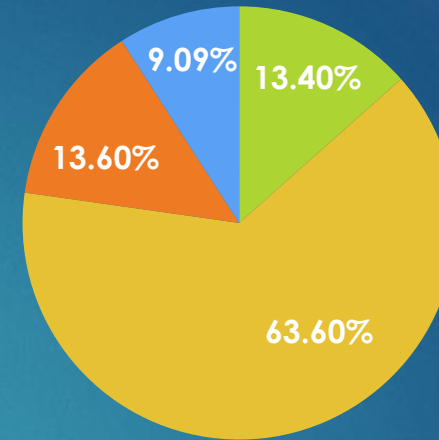
- ▶ **86%** are interested in mindfulness techniques to help treat addiction
- ▶ **86%** have access to a quiet space and have headphones/ear buds

Of the individuals who have tried mindfulness techniques:

- ▶ **82%** found it to be helpful

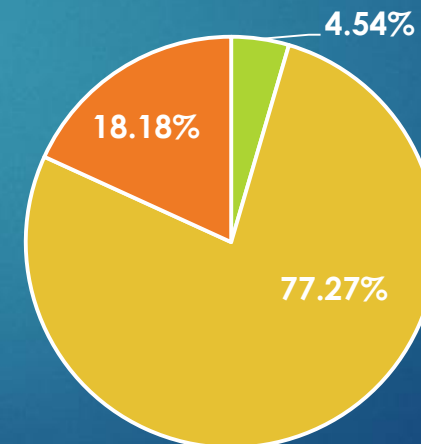
A previous project developed mindfulness audio recordings for patients available online through the Patient Portal. However, only **1** of the individuals surveyed knew how to access this resource!

## Awareness/Use of Mindfulness



■ Never Heard of It ■ Heard of It ■ Tried It ■ Use Regularly

## Amount of Time Patients are Willing to Spend on Mindfulness



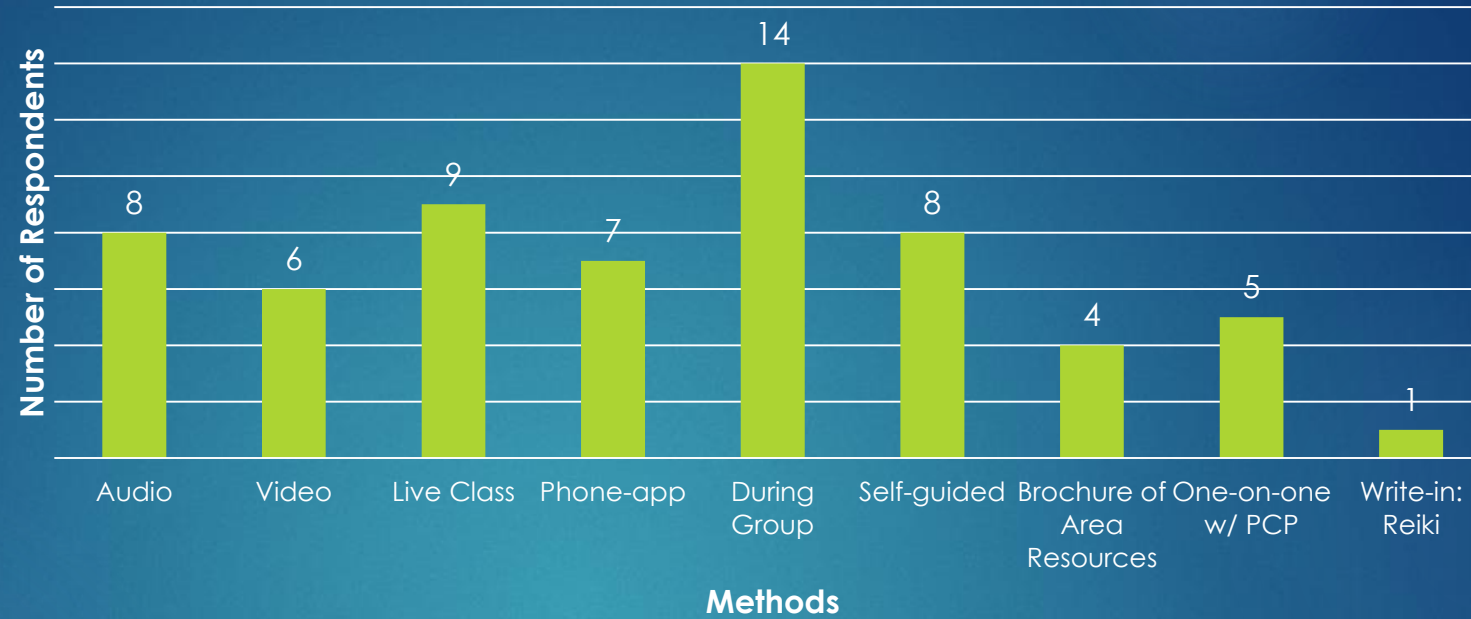
■ < 10 min ■ 10 - 20 min ■ > 20 min

# Results

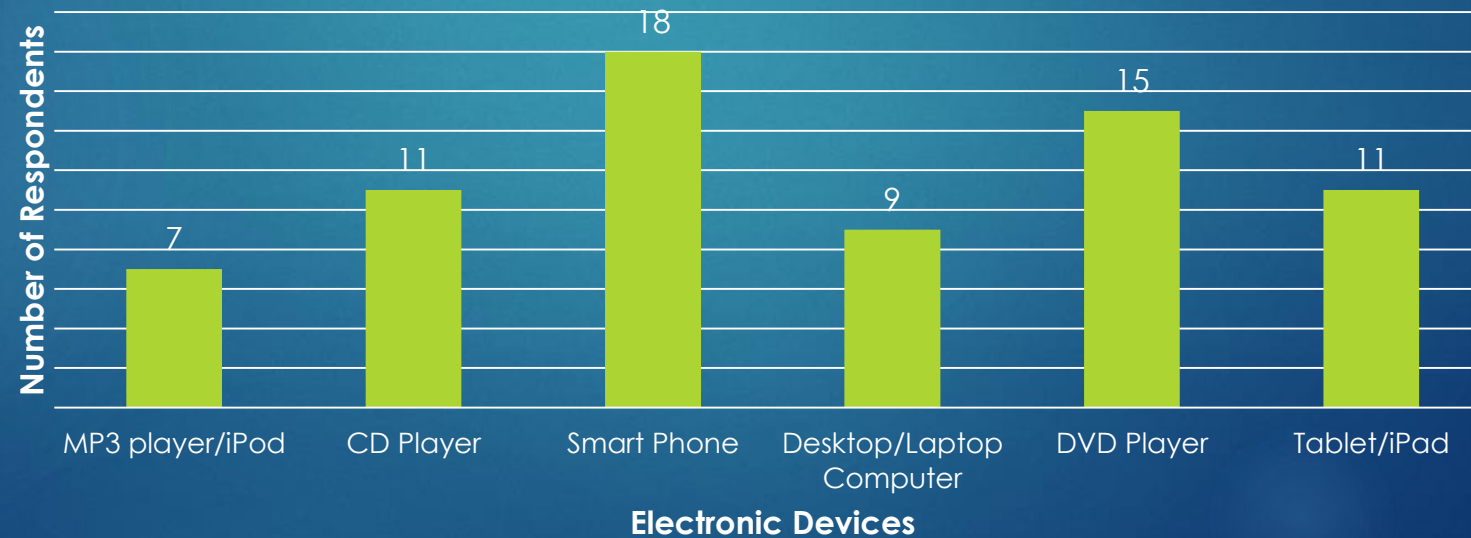
N = 22

6b

### Interest in Types of Mindfulness Methods



### Types of Electronic Devices to Which Respondents Have Access





# Evaluation of Effectiveness & Limitations

- ▶ Evaluation:
  - ▶ Identified an interest in using mindfulness to help prevent relapse
  - ▶ Identified level of interest in different types of mindfulness resources
  - ▶ Identified current access to different types of electronic devices
  - ▶ After identifying barriers and increasing access to mindfulness techniques, effectiveness could be assessed by re-surveying the opioid-dependent patient population
- ▶ Limitations:
  - ▶ Because of the need for IRB exemption approval, time for data collection was limited
  - ▶ A limited number of providers participated in distributing surveys
  - ▶ Number of surveys (N=22)

# Recommendations for Future Projects

- ▶ Increase access to mindfulness practices by providing a cost-effective resource and then distributing that resource
- ▶ Re-survey buprenorphine users after increasing access to mindfulness practices to evaluate success and identify necessary changes
- ▶ Provide an enclosed, quiet space in the waiting room for patients to practice mindfulness techniques.
- ▶ The Patient Portal is a website that provides patients with online access to their medical records and clinic resources. Increasing awareness of and access to the Patient Portal could provide patients better access to information about mindfulness. It would also be helpful to evaluate whether the Patient Portal is user-friendly and how it could be improved.
- ▶ Among patients who are using buprenorphine, compare relapse rates between those who practice mindfulness and those who do not to better assess its role in recovery

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