

Beyond addiction: the medicalization of poverty in the treatment of chronic pain

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Abstract

Our team conducted an Institutional ethnography, including qualitative interviews, observations, and textual analysis of relevant documents, of physicians' work in managing patients with chronic pain in Ontario Canada. We interviewed over 60 participants, including primary care providers (physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and allied health professionals). We applied the theoretical lens of medicalization of poverty to analyze our findings. The concept of medicalization has been used to refer to the process by which problems, experiences or issues become defined as primarily medical in nature, thus requiring the skill and expertise of medicine to correct. The known problems associated with poverty – poor health outcomes, mental health issues and addiction, to name but a few – are now increasingly managed by physicians and more importantly are viewed as being within the purview of physicians to “treat”. This medicalization of poverty is problematic because it is based on a model of individual responsibility for one's health.

Western University in London Ontario. She is conducting a nationally funded ethnographic study to explore the social organization of care for patients with chronic pain, beginning in the standpoint of patients also suffering from poverty, mental health and addictions. Dr. Webster has published more than 80 primarily qualitative studies in Peer reviewed journals and is currently an editorial board member for the Canadian Journal of Pain.

Speaker Publications:

1. “Grappling with Chronic Pain and Poverty during the COVID-19 Pandemic”; Canadian Journal of Pain. / Volume 4 2020
2. “How patient acceptability affects access to breast reconstruction: a qualitative study”; Desalination and Water Treatment/ Vol 151 (2019) 199–211
3. “Doing Science Differently: A Framework for Assessing the Careers of Qualitative Scholars in the Health Sciences”; sage Journals /Vol 121/ 2020

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Biography:

Fiona Webster is a medical sociologist and Associate Professor in the Labatt Family School of Nursing at