**Project Title:** SafeSpace: A Digital Community for People with Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

**Background/Introduction:** The opioid epidemic has been expanding compared to last year’s statistics, showing a continuously increasing positive mortality trend due to drug overdose (NYSDOH, 2022). With the alarming reported records of overdose deaths, the state of New York is continuously implementing and fortifying different programs that will help reduce death cases. Some of the programs are the following: 1) data availability between agencies and affected communities, 2) more healthcare provider training on addiction, pain management, and treatment, 3) drug monitoring programs, 4) local community assistance resources, and 5) statewide and community programs coordination (NYSDOH, 2023). These efforts are being utilized to control and even eradicate the opioid epidemic. These are supported to be effective by different articles; online communities for patients suffering from certain diseases positively affect the patients, family members, and healthcare providers (Fayn et al., 2021). During the pandemic, the online health community played a vital function that providing a favorable environment for information acquisition and knowledge sharing among people (Chen, 2023). These online communities are focused on patient engagement, which results in a positive impact of social support. These social support groups empower patients, leading to more positive health outcomes (Wang et al., 2023). This project aims to create an online community that will help people who have substance use disorder, want to be informed about the opioid epidemic, and are looking for a safe space to network and communicate with people who have or had the same disorder.

**Summary:** This project is about creating an online safe space community that will help primarily individuals suffering from substance use disorder. This safe space will serve as 1) an information haven about the current events and news on the opioid epidemic and 2) a social space wherein people can share their experiences with one another as multiple articles support the positive impact played by online health communities on patients of certain diseases (Wang et al., 2023).

**Clients:** The users of this project will be primarily individuals suffering from substance use disorder, but it also caters to people who suffered and recovered from this disorder, their family members, and healthcare providers.

**Goal:** This project will create an online network among individuals suffering from substance use disorder, their family members, and healthcare providers. Up-to-date information about substance use disorder will be available and accessible to everyone. Also, an online forum will be made available, encouraging individuals to share their experiences. This forum aims to create awareness and build a health network for everyone, providing a safe space where no judgment is tolerated.

**Conclusion:** Implementing this project will help individuals suffering from substance use disorder to become more empowered about themselves and help them succeed in reaching recovery and remission from the disorder.

**References:**

Chen, X. (2023). Online health communities influence people’s health behaviors in the context

of COVID-19. *PLoS One, 18 (4).* doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0282368

Fayn, M. G., de Garets, V. & Rivière, A. (2021). Collective empowerment of an online patient

community: conceptualizing process dynamics using a multi-method qualitative approach. *BMC Health Services Research, Vol. 21, No. 958*. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06988-y>

New York State Department of Health. (2023, February). Addressing the Opioid Epidemic in

New York State. New York State Department of Health. Retrieved September 17, 2023, from <https://www.health.ny.gov/community/opioid_epidemic/>

New York State Department of Health. (2022). *New York State Opioid Annual Data Report*. New

York State Department of Health. Retrieved September 17, 2023, from <https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/opioid/data/pdf/nys_opioid_annual_report_2022.pdf>

Wang, J., Yao, T., & Wang, Y. (2023, February). Patient Engagement as Contributors in Online

Health Communities: The Mediation of Peer Involvement and Moderation of Community Status. *Behav Sci (Basel), 13(2),* 152. doi: 10.3390/bs13020152