

# Drug Addiction: optional subject in the Pharmacy degree in the ULL

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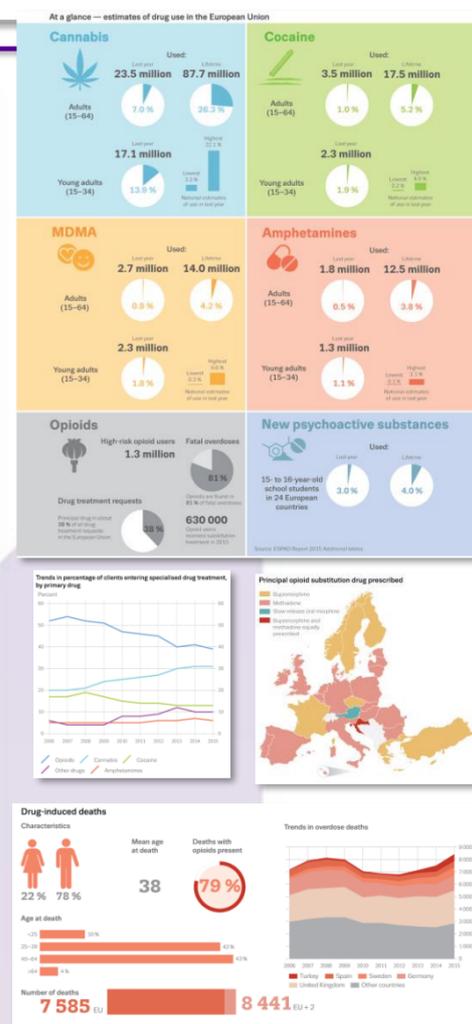


The main **illicit stimulant drugs** are cocaine, amphetamine, methamphetamine and MDMA. **New psychoactive substances**, including new synthetic opioids, synthetic cannabinoids and synthetic cathinones, are causing a wide range of serious harmful effects in Europe. Among drug users, **polydrug consumption** is common and individual patterns of use range from experimental to habitual and dependent consumption.

**Drug addiction** is a complex and chronic disease characterized by drug seeking and use that is compulsive, or difficult to control, despite harmful consequences. Chronic problems include dependence and drug-related infectious disease, while there is also a range of acute harmful effects, with drug overdose being the most documented.

Drug use is a recognized cause of avoidable **mortality** among European adults. Drug overdose continues to be the main cause of death among high-risk drug users. It is estimated that at least 7,585 overdose deaths, involving at least one illicit drug, occurred in the European Union in 2015. Reducing fatal **drug overdoses** and other drug-related deaths is a major public health challenge in Europe.

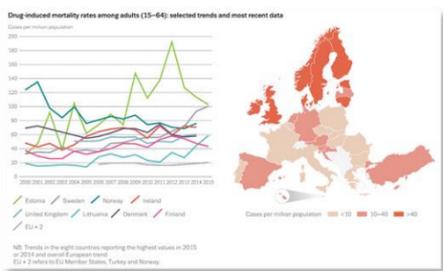
**Addiction is treatable and can be successfully managed.** Combining addiction treatment medicines with behavioral therapy ensures the best chance of success for most patients. Treatment approaches tailored to each patient's drug use patterns and any co-occurring medical, mental, and social problems can lead to continued recovery. **An estimated 1.4 million people received treatment for illicit drug use in the European Union during 2015** provided, among others, in outpatient settings, with specialized outpatient centres being the largest provider in terms of number of drug users treated. General healthcare centres are the second largest providers but **community pharmacies** also play an important role.



The participation of pharmacists in multidisciplinary teams of national toxicology institutes, public health services of different public administrations, the national plan on drugs, methadone maintenance programs, smoking cessation campaigns, among others, is a reality.

The **General Council of Official Associations of Pharmacists** designed and implemented the **Pharmaceutical Indication in Smoking Cessation** in its “Strategic Plan of Implementation of Pharmaceutical Care” and is now betting on the approach against excessive alcohol consumption. In addition, the **Professional Pharmacy Services** of the community pharmacy also bet on the design of pharmaceutical care protocols for consumers of addictive substances focused on the dispensation, pharmaceutical indication and pharmacotherapy monitoring of the treatments.

Pharmacy students as future health care professionals need to be trained in the chronic and acute health problems associated with the use of drugs and their compounded factors (substance properties, administration route, individual vulnerability and the social context in which drugs are consumed).



The “Drug Addiction” optional subject (6 credits) of the Pharmacy degree at the Universidad de La Laguna (ULL) (60 students/year) contributes to the comprehensive training of the student in this field. The theoretical and practical contents promote competences and skills related to the composition of traditional and emerging drugs as well as their properties, action mechanisms, toxicity, analytical methods, consumer profiles and context and the therapeutics and care services/interventions as well as knowledge on content and purity of substances and factors associated with the potential harm and challenging environment concerning drug-related responses.

Multidisciplinary responses and collaboration involving a range of health providers across intervention settings (e.g. Community pharmacies and drug treatment centres) appear to be an important feature of adequate health responses to harm related to use of psychoactive substances in Europe.

Therefore, a need for professional training, guidance and competence building activities responding to new drugs has been highlighted by the EU and this optional topic is the reaction of the University of La Laguna to this need and it is undoubtedly an option for students in the pharmacy degree, although they should enrich this basic training with specialized postgraduate training and continuing education if they want to provide Pharmaceutical Care to these patients.

A recent **EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction)** analysis found that European health professionals in various settings (treatment, prevention and harm reduction) rely predominantly on professional experience acquired in response to established illicit drugs and on the interventions used in that context (dissemination of educational material, provision of sterile injecting equipment or symptomatic management of acute emergency cases).