



# Attorney General Doug Peterson

# News Release

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Suzanne Gage  
402.471.2656  
[Suzanne.gage@nebraska.gov](mailto:Suzanne.gage@nebraska.gov)

## **Opioid Summit Group Announces Launch of Addiction Medicine Fellowship**

OMAHA – Today, Governor Pete Ricketts announced the launch of the state’s first addiction medicine fellowship program. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Attorney General’s office, and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) teamed up to create the program and will partner to oversee it.

“By working together to combat drug addiction, we can come together and build a healthier Nebraska,” said Gov. Ricketts. “The addiction fellowship will address substance use disorders, not only illicit drug addiction, but also the even larger public health issues of nicotine dependence, alcohol use, and binge drinking. Thanks to the collaboration of numerous partners, this opportunity will allow Nebraska to train our own specialists, as well as increase visibility for UNMC’s excellence in clinical training, scholarship, research, and advocacy.”

“Substance use disorder is a disease of the brain, yet we continue to treat this disease outside of mainstream healthcare,” added Dannette R. Smith, chief executive officer of DHHS. “The time has come to fully integrate the science of addiction into medical practice, and we look forward to improving the health of fellow Nebraskans through this innovative fellowship. While Nebraska has a commendably low rate of opioid use disorder, we are not immune, and we cannot lose sight of the importance of prevention and education efforts.”

Addiction medicine fellowships are multispecialty training programs that focus on the provision of care for persons with unhealthy substance use, substance use disorders, and other addictive disorders. Addiction medicine physicians work in diverse settings, including clinical medicine, public health, education, and research. Addiction medicine physicians treat patients across the lifespan who have different degrees of disease severity: from at risk, to those with advanced and complicated diseases, to those in recovery. An addiction medicine fellowship provides fellows with experience in the prevention, clinical evaluation, treatment, and long-term monitoring of substance-related disorders. The training emphasizes the management of medical and psychiatric conditions in the comprehensive care of these patients and is informed by a wide range of evidence-based interventions.

“The fellowship provides an opportunity to normalize the healthcare conversation and healthcare service integration related to substance use disorders,” said Sheri Dawson, DHHS Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. “Substance use constitutes the largest and most costly preventable health problem—accounting for almost a quarter of Nebraska’s annual deaths. Substance use disorders are preventable—more than 90 percent of individuals are exposed to alcohol or substance use before the age of 21. One in every four deaths in our country is attributable to alcohol, nicotine, opioids and other drugs, including non-opioid prescription medications.”

“To provide an integrated approach to fighting the opioid crisis, it is imperative that we address the importance of treatment,” said Attorney General Doug Peterson. “This fellowship is a vital part of addressing treatment needs in Nebraska.”

This fellowship model provides fellows with experience in the prevention, clinical evaluation, treatment, and long-term monitoring of substance-related disorders. The training emphasizes the management of medical, psychiatric, and social conditions in the comprehensive care of these patients and is informed by a wide range of evidence-based interventions. The educational program in addiction medicine must be 12 months in length and must be completed in no more than a two-year period.

Ken Zoucha, M.D., Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Addiction Division Director at UNMC, will direct the fellowship program. Most recently, Dr. Zoucha oversaw the juvenile chemical dependency unit at the Hastings Regional Center. The first year will be spent building the infrastructure for the fellowship in partnership with the academic institutions, such as UNMC and Creighton University. The first fellow will start in September 2019 and graduate in August 2020. Initial funding is provided through a DHHS Division of Behavioral Health grant. Sustained funding is being sought beyond the initiative’s start-up phase.

“UNMC has an opportunity to lead and educate a new generation of physicians that will address the opioid epidemic and other substance use disorders,” said Dr. Jeffrey P. Gold, Chancellor of UNMC. “UNMC educates the workforce to serve individuals with organ system disease, trauma, cancer and more. It works as well to continue as a national leader in addressing the prevention and treatment of substance use and addiction. We need healthcare providers who are comfortable and competent with addiction-related care and serve as change agents to transform our healthcare system.” Dr. Gold noted that primary care, internal medicine providers and specialists who see and treat patients every day are all a natural entry into healthcare for many Nebraskans with underlying substance use disorders.

As of July 2019, the American College of Academic Addiction Medicine (ACGME) stated that there are 67 addiction medicine fellowship training programs in the United States, 52 of which are accredited by ACGME. They are committed to establishing a total of 125 ACGME accredited addiction medicine fellowship programs by 2025.

Watch video of today’s news conference by [clicking here](#).

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