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Responding to the Rise in Heroin and Prescription Pain Medications

Aug 25, 2016 Editorial, Health Comments Off on Responding to the Rise in Heroin and Prescription Pain Medications

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Currently, in Rochester and Monroe County, we are experiencing an increase in the numbers of overdose fatalities, due to heroin, fentanyl, and prescription pain medications, as well as combinations of a variety of synthetic opioids.

While fatalities have declined to 69 in 2015, compared to a high of 95 in 2014 (Monroe County Medical Examiner's Office), the trend for 2016 is moving upward again, to 71 reported by June of this year.

These fatalities are tied to higher potency heroin, heroin/fentanyl combinations, as well as even more potent variations of synthetic opioids. The overdoses know no demographic boundaries in terms of geography, ethnicity, or age!

As a result, in response to the ongoing rise in heroin abuse, and prescription pain medication misuse, as well as the rising numbers of overdoses in our community, DePaul's National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-RA) has brought together individuals from multiple sectors to form the Monroe County Opioid Task Force.

During bi-monthly meetings, the task force has reviewed local and state data, identified assets and barriers specific to the opioid epidemic, shared progress reports, and established a mission and set of goals.

Some of the group's shared successes include the passage of the NYS Comprehensive Opioid Legislation package, and the federal passage of the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act.



The mission of the Monroe County Opioid Task Force is to seek a comprehensive, multi-sector response, with approaches that include prevention education, treatment, recovery, and enforcement strategies.

The goals include access to services equal to that of other diseases; immediate access to treatment as well as after care and wrap-around services; access to Narcan to reverse opioid overdoses; access to prevention education services; clear process for low-level crime referral to treatment; and access to medications that support treatment, and recovery.

Progress is underway, and resources have been created that include the "Treatment Availability Dashboard," which can be found at the NYS Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) website, at www.oasas.ny.gov; a series of NYS OASAS YouTube videos (Navigating the Substance Use Disorder System of Care Series), which can be found at www.oasas.ny.gov/treatment; and the resource-rich Combat Heroin website, at www.combatheroin.ny.

Locally, the task force has collaboratively been working to develop and distribute a brochure of local resources which will include access to care information, and other valuable information for families and first responders, including EMS, law enforcement, and fire department officials.

It is also important that we proactively consider several prevention measures such as:

- Increasing community education and awareness of the risks, signs and symptoms of opioids, as well as other drugs of abuse.
- Increasing the number of families and friends who have completed the Overdose Prevention program, and instruct them on the use of Narcan (a drug that safely reverses an opioid overdose).

And, for consumers and patients, ask your medical or dental provider the following questions:

- Are there risks associated with taking pain medications?
- How long can I safely take this pain medication?
- How would I know if I have become addicted to a prescribed pain medication?
- Are there other options, or safer alternative therapies, to better respond to pain?

The Monroe County Opioid Task Force will continue to move forward to ensure that individuals and families impacted by the disease of addiction will have full and complete access to services equal to that of other diseases.

We seek to remove the stigma surrounding the disease of addiction.

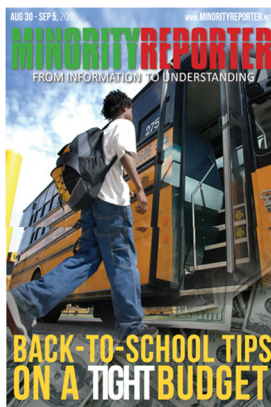
And, currently, prevention education efforts, with requests to NCADD-RA for education on opioids, are at an all-time high.

To request additional information, or to schedule a presentation on this topic or other addiction-related topics, please contact Jennifer Faringer (NCADD-RA) at jfaringer@depaul.org.

Interested individuals may also access many of the resources mentioned at our website at www.ncadd-ra.org.

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