

Reducing Prescription Opioid Abuse in Mendocino County

Much has been written about drug addiction, both the use of illegal and prescription medications. These stories have become commonplace; almost everyone knows someone whose life or family has been affected by this public health issue.

The impact becomes more startling when we review the data reported by the Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency in September 2014 for the years 2010-2012 which revealed that Mendocino County exceeds California averages in drug abuse indicators. Non-fatal opioid overdose hospitalizations were reported at 45 per 100,000 in Mendocino County as compared to 20 per 100,000 for the State of California. Drug overdose hospitalizations (excluding opioids) were double those reported by the State. There is a significant difference between the rates of Emergency Department visits for drug overdoses, with Mendocino County data reporting 110 visits per 100,000 population members as compared to the 60 visits per 100,000 that the State of California reports. Healthy Mendocino's Community Dashboard cites the [Death Rate due to Drug Poisoning](#) in Mendocino County as 18.3 deaths per 100,000 which places the County in the lower third ranking for this indicator.

These statistics paint a disturbing picture that presents a dilemma for the organizations and agencies in Mendocino County dealing with drug abuse issues on a daily basis. The impact and costs for the County's legal and judicial systems have not been factored into this article, but are just as alarming. The rest of this article will focus on the problems with opioid abuse. How did we get here, and how do we begin to reverse this trend?

For many years, people have sought help from physicians for pain related to many conditions. And for many years there was little to offer patients that provided relief. Physician practices have changed over the last four decades. In the decades between 1970 and 1990, legislation held healthcare professionals responsible for the under-treatment of pain as new long-lasting opioids were developed and marketed. By 2005, evidence of adverse effects and addiction thought to be associated with the new medications was on the upswing. The societal impact of opioid dependence, the cost of medications and other related health care services have escalated, resulting in a state of crisis.

National organizations are working to develop guidelines to reduce the use of opioids, explore alternative methodologies for pain control in combination with patient education to lower death rates, improve the quality of life for those who are dependent on these medications, and reduce the cost of medications and services. Of course there are end-of-life issues, and patients whose medical situations require other measures to treat their conditions.

Mendocino County's Health and Human Services Agency along with community providers are taking steps to address these issues from a clinical perspective. The Drug Overdose Summary-

Mendocino County (2014) prepared by the Agency revealed how acute the problem is in our county. In response to this information, Mendocino County's Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), Alliance for Rural Community Health (ARCH), and Partnership Health Plan of California (PHC) conducted an educational session. It was attended by more than 80 health care providers and focused on strategies to reduce the escalating use of high doses on opioids while still providing pain control for patients. Partnership Health Plan of California (PHC), the Medical Managed Care Plan for Mendocino County, is responsible for the care of more than 30% of the County's residents, and contracts with the local medical community for those services. The Alliance for Rural Community Health, the network of community health centers in the county, treats a majority of the patients who seek pain control. Pain management services have grown dramatically in recent years. The ARCH health centers are working with PHC to devise and implement programs for the safe use of opioids. The goal is to reverse the escalating use of high doses of medications, educate and work with patients to offer more appropriate methodologies to reduce pain, decrease emergency department visits, and decrease hospitalizations and deaths from opioid overdoses of people in Mendocino County.

If you are interested in more information about this topic please follow the links below. For services contact a community health center located in your community. To locate a health center in your community please go to www.ruralcommunityhealth.org.

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ADD Links to:

Healthy Mendocino: Community Dashboard -

<http://www.healthymendocino.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=NS-Indicator&file=indicator&iid=11101789>

Mendocino County Health and Human Services Agency: Drug Overdose Summary-Mendocino County (2014)

Thumbnail from CDC about Opioid Use