DRUGS END DREAMS – The Opioid Crisis

Partners Convention Report October 2018

Our health education topic ***DRUGS END DREAMS***, focused on the opioid epidemic, began 2 years ago. There has not been an absence of news on this topic, and no simple answers, as overuse and overdose numbers remain high.

*What we know*:

In the late 1990s, pharmaceutical companies reassured the medical community that patients would not become addicted to opioid pain relievers, and healthcare providers began prescribing them at greater rates. Increased prescriptions of opioid medications led to widespread misuse of prescription and non-prescription opioids. It then became clear that these medications are indeed highly addictive. Opioid misuse and related overdoses, as well as a rising incidence of newborns experiencing withdrawal syndrome due to opioid use and misuse during pregnancy became devastating consequences. Due to intravenous drug use, infectious diseases such as Hepatitis B and C, and HIV have risen sharply in the last five years.

*What’s being done*:

**FEDERAL --** The Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Epidemic, established in March 2017, sent a report to the President with 56 recommendations to combat the opioid crisis, including expanded drug court systems, educational requirements for prescribers, and media use to discuss preventive services and treatment availability for ***substance use disorder***. The Council of Economic Advisors put the cost of the epidemic at $504 billion. The current funding is $1 billion (the US was spending $20 billion in 1995 to combat AIDS).

**WISCONSIN –** In 2013, Rep. Nygren introduced bills that laid the foundation for his Heroin, Opioid Prevention and Education (HOPE) Agenda. A total of 30 proposals now make up the Agenda.

**--**Governor Walker created the Governor’s Task Force on Opioid Abuse in 2016 to continue work being done to combat opioid abuse and make additional recommendations to end the opioid crisis in Wisconsin.

--The [Prescription Drug Monitoring Program](https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/opioids/providers.htm) (PDMP) became mandatory in April 2017.

--Drug take back events and distribution of lock boxes and lock bags are held throughout the state.

--The Wisconsin Department of Justice set up the website DOSE OF REALITY to educate about the risks and dangers of using prescription narcotics, as well as the signs of abuse.

--The DHS awarded a $500,000 annual grant to the University of Wisconsin System April 2018 to provide doctors guidance on treating patients who may have an addiction.

--17 counties and 4 tribes were awarded one-year grants totaling nearly $2.4 million in May 2018 from the Wisconsin DHS to provide treatment to people addicted to opioids. In August 2018, 70 community coalitions were awarded grants from the Wisconsin DHS to support their work preventing opioid abuse.

***WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE:*** Education is essential. Decrease access by hiding or locking away opioids so pets, children or other people won't find them. Properly dispose of prescription painkillers and use safe alternatives to manage pain. Consider opioid overuse as a disease rather than a moral choice, changing the stigma of use disorder.

We should make it a priority to ensure that people with substance use disorders receive medical care, psychosocial interventions, and long term treatment. Advocate for better options.

**Thank you for your support and participation in our health education focus.** I hope that our knowledge and awareness of the opioid epidemic has increased, and that we realize it won’t be resolved quickly or easily, but we are all in some way affected.

Sherry Jelic – CHE Chair – Partners of WHA