

# To Your HEALTH Fresno County

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## Addressing the Opioid Overdose Epidemic

July 6, 2016

On November 1, 2011 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared prescription painkiller overdose a [national epidemic](#). Misinformation with regard to treatment of chronic non-cancer pain, along with aggressive marketing of newer, longer-acting opioids in the management of this pain, led to a quadrupling of sales of these prescription painkillers from 1999 to 2013.

Today, the U.S. consumes 83% of the world supply of oxycodone (OxyContin) and 97% of the world supply of hydrocodone (Vicodin), while making up only 4.6% of the world's population. It is estimated that 14.6% of the U.S. adult population has chronic pain, 3 to 4 % of U.S. adults are being treated with long-term opioid therapy, and 2 million Americans are currently abusing, or are dependent on, opioid pain medications.

The more frequent use of these substances (including Vicodin, OxyContin, Percocet, Codeine, and Morphine) over longer periods of time has resulted in a dramatic increase in rates of addiction and death due to overdose. Because past use of prescription opioids is the strongest risk factor for heroin initiation and use, overuse of these prescription opioids has driven an only slightly less dramatic increase in deaths due to heroin overdose.

Annual deaths due to prescription painkiller overdoses currently outnumber deaths from motor vehicle accidents, claiming an average of over 46 lives every day. Economically, the cost of opioid abuse to this country was estimated to be \$56 billion in 2007.

Prescription painkiller abuse is now one of the fastest growing public health concerns in the U.S. and the personal toll that opioid abuse takes on individuals, their friends, and their families is alarming.

While Fresno County is somewhat less impacted by this epidemic than are many areas in the nation and the state, we rank 17<sup>th</sup> among California counties in deaths related to opioid pharmaceuticals with an age-adjusted rate almost twice the state rate of 3.8/100,000.

The strongest effort to date at curtailing this epidemic locally has been the Lock It Up program which offers outreach education to students and their parents on the topic of drugs and alcohol, and the Lock It Up, Clean It Out, Drop It Off program which encourages, and provides information on, appropriate disposal of prescription medications.

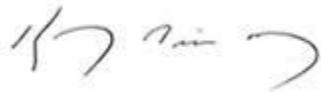
To further address the epidemic locally a number of public health partners have come together to form the Central Valley Opioid Safety Coalition. This coalition will ultimately be comprised of representatives from hospitals, clinics, health plans, the medical society, pharmacies, law enforcement, addiction treatment centers, Fresno County Department of Public Health, Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health, and other community groups. The coalition envisions adopting the three federally sponsored approaches to the opioid overuse epidemic which include: 1) encouraging safe prescribing by providers, 2) increasing access to medication-assisted treatment of addiction, and 3) increasing use and distribution of naloxone (Narcan) in the immediate treatment of overdose.

The initial emphasis of the coalition will be on the safe prescribing of these medications, and will be predicated upon recent guidelines, especially those issued by the Medical Board of California in November of 2014 and those issued by the CDC in March of this year. Key elements of these guidelines are the consideration of other pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical options in the treatment of chronic pain, careful assessment of the risk, versus the benefit, of treatment with opioid medication if it is used, and close monitoring of patient dosage and usage.

Available to assist with the latter of these is the California Prescription Drug Monitoring Program's (PDMP) [Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System](#) (CURES) tool. Pharmacies and health care providers that dispense these medications directly are required to report their dispensing information to the Department of Justice weekly. All California licensed pharmacies and all California licensed prescribers who are authorized to prescribe opioid (and other scheduled) medications, that are registered with CURES, are able to acquire a Patient Activity Report (PAR) detailing all of a patient's opioid (or other scheduled) drug prescription activity over the prior year. These pharmacies and prescribers are mandated to register with CURES by July 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

The coalition will be assisting local health care providers in adopting these new pain management guidelines, and utilizing these tools in their practice, by orchestrating an educational series, in three parts, given by recognized subject matter experts. The first of these is *Understanding Pain* (scheduled for September 21<sup>st</sup> of this year), followed by *Management of Chronic Pain* on November 9, 2016, then *Safe Prescribing* on January 18, 2017.

Here's to your health!



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