



Health Advisory

March 8, 2016

Warning Regarding Misuse and Abuse of Prescription Opioids

This Health Advisory is being issued to bring attention to an alarming trend and national epidemic of misuse and abuse of prescription opioids and sedatives. As our communities and families face the devastation of loss associated with addiction and misuse of these prescription medications we call attention to the need for health care professionals to be aware of the scope of this epidemic and new guidelines for prescribing.

Nationally, each year, prescription narcotics result in more fatal overdoses than heroin and cocaine combined. Add to this that the second leading cause of fatal overdoses are prescription sedatives — medicines like Xanax and Ativan, and we are compelled to recognize and address the unintended consequence that may result from the misuse of these medications. Parallel with this trend is a resurgence in overdoses related to heroin abuse.

Data from the California Department of Public Health reveals that there were 53 accidental drug overdose deaths in 2003 in Contra Costa County. In 2008 there were 84 and in 2013 there were 113. Of profound concern is the trend that underlies these occurrences. What we are experiencing in our County is, tragically, mirrored across the Nation. Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that the death rate from drug overdose has more than doubled since 2000 and on a national level has claimed the lives of nearly 500,000 individuals during this same time period. In 2014 there were 47,055 deaths from drug overdose, more than any previous year on record. Drug overdose has now replaced automobile accidents as the number one cause of accidental death among individuals age 25-64. <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/wk/mm6450.pdf>

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, prescription opioid sales in the United States increase by 300% between 1999 and 2010. *CDC Vital Signs MMWR 2011:60(43); 1487-1492*. Between 1999 and 2013 the number of deaths attributed to opioid pain relievers had increased by 400%, <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/deaths.htm>

A Call to Action:

Counties, health systems and community partners across the greater bay area are galvanized in their efforts to address this epidemic. Closer to home, the Alameda-Contra Costa Medical Association together with local public health agencies, health insurers, community partners and health care provider organizations are calling for Emergency Departments, Urgent Care Centers and Primary Care clinicians to adopt a set of guidelines for prescribing opioids. These guidelines are intended to help balance the need for the treatment of pain with the very real risk of drug dependency, abuse and addiction. Electronic copies of the guidelines and other helpful information can be downloaded from www.EastBaySafeRX.org.



The guidelines are also attached here for reference. In addition, health systems are expanding the availability of drug treatment programs, medication assisted treatment, and drug counseling services.

Prescription drug abuse is a complex social problem that requires new dialogue, innovative solutions and the engagement of our health care community. Launched in May 2015, East Bay Safe Prescribing Coalition brings together stakeholders across sectors, including physicians, pharmacists, schools, law enforcement agencies, public health officials and concerned community members to design and implement local strategies for prevention and awareness. Efforts by regional health care delivery systems and health insurers have shown positive results in reducing the number of prescriptions for opioid-based pain medication. In addition, the Contra Costa MEDS (Medication Education and Disposal Safety) Coalition is a community based effort that has engaged multiple sectors, communities and partners to advance awareness and develop local strategies to help prevent the misuse of prescription medication. Individuals interested in joining coalition efforts are encouraged to contact Coalition chair, April Rovero, at 925-980-5490.

Individuals seeking confidential assistance with drug abuse treatment can contact 1-800-662-HELP (4357). Individuals can also contact the Contra Costa Behavioral Health Department at 1-800-846-1652, Monday-Friday 8:00am to 5:00. Providers or the Public can also contact the California Poison Control Center at: 1-800-222-1222. More information can be found at: <http://www.samhsa.gov/prescription-drug-miuse-abuse> or from the CDC at http://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/states/state_prevention.html

