Stemming the Opiate Epidemic Through Education and Outreach

Nicole Schramm-Sapyta, Ph.D.1, Andrew Muzyk, Pharm.D.2, Zachary Smothers, MBS1, Katie Kanter3, Mounika Pogula4, Hazel Sanchez5, Madeline Thorton6

1Duke Institute for Brain Sciences, 2Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 3Neuroscience, 4Global Health, 5Economics

Problem: From 2002 – 2015 there was a 2.8 fold increase in the total amount of opioid overdose deaths in the United States. Drug overdoses now account for more accidental deaths than car accidents. Drug overdose deaths are a proxy-measure demonstrating the widespread epidemic of drug misuse and addiction. Approach: Our team sought to explore the extent and magnitude of the opiate epidemic in Durham and the greater North Carolina community. Our team quickly learned that intervention in this area would require a multi-faceted approach. Over the past year, we have developed relationships with partners in advocacy, first responders, and the medical community to create initiatives that addressed the opiod crisis in Durham and North Carolina.

Advocacy

North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition (NCHRC) is a statewide grassroots organization dedicated to advocacy and implementation of harm reduction strategies to address the dangers of opioid use. NCHRC engages in grassroots advocacy, resource and policy development, coalition building, and direct services for law enforcement and people impacted by drug use, incarceration, sex work, overdose, gender, HIV and hepatitis.

Our Bass Connections Team partnered with NCHRC for several projects related to harm reduction and education for individuals with opiate misuse disorder.

Emergency Naloxone Rescue Kits
- Naloxone is an opioid antagonist that serves as an opiate overdose-reversal drug.
- NCHRC distributes naloxone rescue kits to populations at high risk for opiate overdose.
- Last summer, our team assembled 624 kits to be distributed across North Carolina.

First Responders

The Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) is a model for community policing that brings together law enforcement, mental health providers, hospital emergency departments and individuals and families with mental illness—including substance use disorders—to improve responses to people in crisis. The Durham CIT collaborative has been at the forefront of these international efforts.

Learning first-hand about the work of this group made us want to support their work as much as possible. We have begun by organizing a few events to raise awareness.

Grand Rounds.
- CIT Collaborative Coordinator Laylon Williams of Alliance Behavioral Health, and Durham Police Department’s CIT Coordinator, Sgt. Tad Ochman described their work at the Duke University Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences Grand Rounds on December __, 2016.

Duke University Forum.
- On February 21st, 2017 our team hosted a panel discussion entitled “Mental Health: A First Responders’ Perspective”.
- Members of the CIT collaborative, including several law enforcement officers, Durham County EMS responders, and mental health counselors from Alliance Behavioral Health described their experiences on the front lines of these efforts...
- The discussion was positive and engaged with an audience of approximately 50 students, faculty, and community members.

Next Steps.
- Our work with this group has led to a collaboration to analyze 911 call data to assess the efficacy of this approach and the extent of cost-savings to the community. This will be implemented through Duke’s Data Plus Initiative beginning in summer 2017.

Health Care

The CDC recommends expanding access and use of naloxone as a method to alleviate the consequences of the opioid epidemic. Currently at Duke University Hospital Emergency Department (DUH ED), only 1 out of every 100 patients with an opioid-related diagnosis receives naloxone.

Thus, the next step for our Bass Connections team will be a quality-improvement intervention to distribute naloxone to patients at risk of an opioid overdose via the DUH ED. Beginning this summer, we will work to implement proper screening and increased prescribing for patients at risk of an opioid overdose.

Access to Naloxone.
- Our team has begun negotiations with one manufacturer of Naloxone to provide free units for the study. If approved, the medication will be distributed, free of charge, to at-risk individuals who present to the DUH ED.

EPIC Order Set.
- Our team will create an order set in EPIC health management software to make it simpler for ED staff to prescribe naloxone to at-risk patients.

Prescriber Education.
- We will educate the DUH ED staff to reduce stigma associated with high-risk patients and to facilitate utilization of the new order set.
- This intervention will be tested during calendar year 2018 to assess feasibility and initial effects.

Resource Cards.
- Individuals with opiate use disorder often struggle to identify affordable and accessible treatment providers.
- We developed resource cards identifying both addiction treatment and other relevant health resources for every county in North Carolina, examples below.

Syringe Exchange Lobbying.
- Bass Connections team called local legislators to advocate for the legalization of syringe exchange.
- On July 11, 2016 Governor Pat McCrory signed a bill that legalized SEPs in North Carolina.
- This law legalizes a previously-stigmatized yet successful approach to protect drug users from many deleterious health effects of drug use.

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