

October 9 Durham Herald-Sun Column Partnership for a Healthy Durham

Opioid overdose continues to be a major public health problem in the United States. It has contributed significantly to accidental deaths among those who use or misuse illicit and prescription opioids. In fact, U.S. overdose deaths involving prescription opioid analgesics increased to about 19,000 deaths in 2014. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data, health care providers wrote 259 million prescriptions for painkillers in 2012, enough for every American adult to have a bottle of pills.

Opioids include illegal drugs such as heroin, as well as prescription medications used to treat pain such as morphine, codeine, methadone, oxycodone and Fentanyl. Overdose can occur when a person takes too much medication by accident or because they misused an opioid.

Nearly 50 million American adults have significant chronic pain or severe pain according to a recent study done by the National Institute of Health. There needs to be more coordinated care for individuals living with chronic pain. This in turn will aid in limiting the multiple emergency department (ED) visits with providers prescribing opioids to treat pain. The CDC estimates one out of five patients with non-cancer pain or pain-related diagnosis are prescribed opioids.

Durham County needs health care providers to start using the Controlled Substance Reporting System, which is the prescription drug monitoring system for North Carolina. Other effective strategies for combating opioid overdoses include providers having the conversation with patients about the risk of addiction with long-term use of opioids, using tools and resources for alternative therapies and the importance of having Naloxone (Narcan) available in the event that an unintentional overdose occurs.

Naloxone is a safe effective prescription drug that reverses an opioid overdoses if given in a timely fashion.

Naloxone does not need to be administered by a medical professional and can be administered by a friend or family member. The N.C. Good Samaritan/Naloxone Access Law (N.C. Gen. Stat. 90-106.2) protects people who ask for help from 911, the police, or EMS because they or another person is having a drug overdose.

State Health Director, Dr. Randall Williams signed a standing order for Naloxone dispensing on June 20, 2016. This standing order serves as a broad prescription, and allows any pharmacist licensed in North Carolina to dispense naloxone to any patient who meets the standing order criteria without having an actual written prescription.

The Partnership for a Healthy Durham is a community coalition that works closely with the Durham County Department of Public Health to identify the greatest health needs in the county and then forms action teams to address those needs. The Partnership's Substance Use/Mental Health committee is working towards increasing awareness of the

use of naloxone and providing naloxone training in the county. For more information on the standing order, where you can find naloxone and general patient education and materials visit www.naloxonesaves.org. For more information on CDC's recommendations on using opioids visit www.cdc.gov.

For more information about the Partnership or to get involved with the Substance Use/Mental Health committee, visit www.healthdurham.org or call 919-560-7833.