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October 3, 2017

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Saint Peter's launches assault on opioid abuse

- *Program stresses education, community resources* -
- *Seminar on the crisis is this Friday at hospital* -

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.: Saint Peter's Healthcare System announced today it has launched a multidisciplinary effort to help reverse the epidemic of opioid drug abuse and deaths within our communities in cooperation with a variety of public-interest groups and law-enforcement agencies in central New Jersey.

"Prescription pain medication is the nation's fastest-growing public health crisis, with upward of 9 million people in this country using prescription medications for non-medical uses," said Linda Carroll, RN, chief nursing officer at Saint Peter's. "Opioid pain relievers are involved in more overdose deaths than cocaine and heroin combined. This is an insidious public health crisis unlike anything before."

The initiative is overseen by an opioid task force comprised of members of senior leadership, physicians, nursing, emergency services, and pharmacy operations within Saint Peter's Healthcare System, in tandem with resource-sharing partnerships with community groups such as the Wellspring Center for Prevention; Consortium for Healthier Communities; Woodbridge Opioid Overdose Recovery Program; Healthier Middlesex Consortium, and law enforcement, including the Middlesex County Chiefs of Police Association.

The opioid task force has identified these areas of need and action items:

- Education – physician/staff education within health care on opioid legislation and in-service programs for pain-resource nurses.
- Community engagement – a Narcan replacement program; recovery coaches; collaboration with local chiefs of police; classroom education for Middlesex County schoolchildren provided by Saint Peter’s Community Health Services staff, and partnership with the Woodbridge opioid addiction recovery coach program.

The program’s recovery coaches themselves are recovering addicts with at least four years of sobriety who have been trained upward of 40 hours. They make initial contact with addicts and follow up by phone in six to nine months.

Saint Peter’s social workers, who assist patients and their families with care management, will also be available to meet with student assistance counselors and guidance counselors to educate them about community treatment resources.

Saint Peter’s will also make available a free onsite community outreach education program entitled “The Opioid Epidemic: A Perspective on Addiction” to schools and community groups. The 40-minute presentation includes perspectives on opioid abuse from a parent whose daughter was lost to addiction, an area chief of police, and a family nurse practitioner who works in community health services.

- Non-narcotic alternatives to pain management - Saint Peter’s Emergency Department non-opioid use protocols; an Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS) program.
- Resources - a pocket-size guide to addiction services; an opioid risk tool incorporated into the Saint Peter’s electronic health record; pain management and education tools on the Saint Peter’s Healthcare System website.
See: <http://sphome/sites/spuh/PCS/PainManagement/default.aspx>

As part of this initiative, Saint Peter’s will host “The Opioid Epidemic: A Perspective on Addiction,” from noon to 1 p.m. this Friday, Oct. 6, in the Sister Marie de Pazzi Conference Center, ground floor of the hospital, for health care

professionals and community partners. October 6 is Knock Out Opioid Abuse Day in New Jersey. Speakers are John Zebrowski, Sayreville chief of police; Jean Stevenson, mother of a young woman who died of an opioid overdose, and Marge Drozd, MSN, RN, director of community health services for Saint Peter's.

"From my perspective as a community nurse, this is an epidemic that knows no economic, racial or geographic limits. It's so dangerous to our families and the social fabric of our neighborhoods that a solution must be found," Drozd said.

Saint Peter's, in cooperation with its partners, will also address the scourge of opioid abuse and its solutions in front of more than 1,500 students, parents and faculty during a day-long series of talks on October 25 in the South Plainfield public schools. High school assembly presentations will take place at 9 a.m. and 9:50, to be followed by a 1:20 p.m. middle school presentation and a one-hour presentation for parents at 6:30 p.m. in the high school auditorium. Guidance counselors training will also take place for 45 minutes at the high school.

Opioids are derived from the opium poppy or are available in synthetic form, both used for pain relief. Popular opioids include codeine; morphine; hydrocodone (Vicodin, Lortab); Oxycodone (Percocet, Oxycontin), oxymorphone (Opana); methadone; Demerol; Fentanyl; Loperamide (Imodium), and heroin.

Approximately 175 people die each day nationwide from a drug overdose. In 2016 alone, 1,230 people a week died from a drug overdose, up 22 percent from the previous year. Drug overdoses caused more deaths in 2015 (52,404) than firearms (36,252) or vehicular crashes (38,300). Overdose deaths from opioids nearly quadrupled from 2000 to 2014, from 8,407 to 33,091 annually.

In New Jersey, Middlesex County had the highest growth rate for deaths associated with heroin for 2014, an increase of 420 percent in four years.

Public health experts offer the following guidelines as a means of prevention:

- Prescription medications should be used exactly as prescribed;
- Dispose of expired/unused medications at approved, secured drop boxes;

- Publicize support and educational resources that are available to the public;
- Reinforce that no one is immune to the potential of opioid addiction and death.

About Saint Peter's Healthcare System

Saint Peter's Healthcare System Inc., parent company of the Saint Peter's healthcare delivery system, is comprised of Saint Peter's University Hospital, a 478-bed acute-care teaching hospital; Saint Peter's Foundation, the fundraising arm of the hospital, and Saint Peter's Health and Management Services Corp., which oversees the system's outpatient facilities including the CARES Surgicenter and the New Brunswick Cardiac Cath Lab. Saint Peter's is sponsored by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Metuchen. Visit www.saintpetershcs.com or call 732-745-8600 for more information.