Combatting Ohio’s Opioid Epidemic

Through Education, Treatment, Research and Community Engagement

Unintentional drug overdose is now Ohio’s leading cause of injury-related death, and the state has the fifth-highest rate of overdose deaths in the U.S. These statistics highlight the need for effective treatment and intervention techniques as well as health professionals equipped to assist communities that are particularly affected by the opioid crisis. The University of Cincinnati (UC) and UC Health are addressing Ohio’s opioid epidemic with a cross-campus, multi-pronged approach emphasizing education, treatment, research and community engagement.

UC/UC Health integrates opioid addiction education into coursework in the College of Medicine (CoM), College of Nursing (CoN), College of Allied Health Sciences (CAHS) and in the James L Winkle College of Pharmacy (JLWCoP) to ensure that all health professional students are equipped to address all aspects of opioid addiction. Using a $1 million grant from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the CAHS provides interprofessional training enabling healthcare providers to provide early or preventive intervention to those with or at risk of developing substance abuse disorders. Similarly, student coursework in the CoN centers on the safe prescription and administration of opioids and substance abuse treatment. CoN faculty also are actively engaged in community response through their participation in organizations such as the Hamilton County Heroin Coalition and Clermont County Opiate Taskforce.

UC Health provides wide-ranging clinical services to more than 700 patients suffering from opioid use disorder (OUD), tailored to the specific needs of diverse patient populations. For example, the Perinatal Addictions Clinic is a collaborative effort between several different disciplines aimed at providing perinatal, addiction and mental health treatment specifically to women with OUD. The UC Health Addiction Sciences Division Consultation Service also delivers treatment to people with OUD, but includes an additional workforce development component focused on training providers and students to care for patients with OUD.

UC/UC Health also are pioneering new treatment methods through cutting-edge research funded by a variety of federal agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and focused on patient-centered intervention methods, post-treatment behavioral change, postpartum treatment retention, teleconference education, overdose education and naloxone distribution. Taking a broader, public health angle, JLWCoP opioid-related research projects focus on detailed policy analysis, such as evaluations of opioid prescribing guidelines, impact assessments of opioid-related legislation and epidemiological research into the most affected but underserved communities across Ohio.

Central to the success of UC and UC Health’s efforts to combat Ohio’s opioid epidemic is the Opioid Task Force. Co-chaired by Melissa DelBello, MD, Dr. Stanley and Mickey Kaplan Professor and Chair of Psychiatry at the CoM, and Neil MacKinnon, PhD, Dean and Professor of the JLWCoP, this group serves as the coordinating body for the opioid-related activities performed across the university and UC Health. The Opioid Task Force fosters enhanced collaboration through interprofessional research, education and practice, as well as community outreach.

In carrying out these complementary activities, UC and UC Health exemplifies the critical role academic health centers play in effectively addressing a widespread public health emergency.

Ohio faces unintentional drug overdose as the leading cause of injury-related death, and the fifth-highest rate of overdose deaths in the U.S.

UC/UC Health are addressing the situation: Equipping health professional students and community caregivers with knowledge of:

• early or preventive interventions for those at risk
• appropriate opioid prescription and administration
• substance abuse treatment options

Providing clinical services to those with and at risk for opioid use disorder (OUD)

• UC Health currently serves more than 700 OUD patients
• treatment tailored to diverse patient populations
• interdisciplinary collaboration aimed specifically at women with OUD

Advancing treatments and public policy with innovation and research

• developing new clinical interventions
• studying post-treatment behavioral change
• utilizing teleconferencing technology
• naloxone distribution
• policy analysis and evaluations
• impact assessments
• epidemiological research

Created an Opioid Task Force to:

• coordinate opioid-related activities
• enhance collaboration through interprofessional research, education and care
• provide community outreach

For additional information on the UC/UC Health Opioid Task Force, contact Greg Vehr (greg.vehr@uc.edu) or Candace Sabers (candace.sabers@uchealth.com).