



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO
HEALTH AGENCY

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Jeff Hamm *Health Agency Director*

Penny Borenstein, MD, MPH *Health Officer*

March 2017

Dear Physician/Clinic:

We are writing to you to make you aware of county-wide efforts taking place right here in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County aimed at addressing the national epidemic of opiate pain medication misuse. SLO County has not been immune to this increasing problem. According to CURES, there were 774 opioid prescriptions for every 1,000 SLO residents in 2013; nearly 40% higher than the state's opiate prescription rate. Due to this increased availability, the perceived safety of prescription medication and the highly addictive quality of opiates, the occurrence of misuse and accidental deaths has been on the rise. Per County Vital Records, **the county experienced 36 deaths due to opioid misuse in 2015 and a tripling of opioid-related emergency room visits since 2006.**

Beginning in January 2016, with grant funding from the California Health Care Foundation, a large cadre of participants came together from the various stakeholder groups involved with this issue. The resultant **SLO Opioid Safety Coalition** has been meeting since the beginning of the year and has formed 5 "Action Teams" with the goal of reducing deaths. The progress, resources developed and recommendations of the 5 Action Team's efforts are highlighted below. We ask that you share this information with all prescribers in your practice, including Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants.

The Safe Prescribing & Health Care Action Team:

1. Encourages all prescribers to be aware of and learn about the [new law related to Controlled Substance Utilization Review and Evaluation System \(CURES\)](#), a statewide database that captures all prescriptions for Schedule II, III, and IV drugs. **As of September 27, 2016, all prescribers of controlled substances are required to review the CURES database before or within one business day of prescribing a scheduled II, III, and IV controlled substance; then at least quarterly thereafter.**
2. Adopted the flyer, [Safe Pain Medicine Prescribing](#), for patients who might be struggling with pain management. This flyer is currently being distributed to patients in SLO County hospitals.
3. Encourages all prescribers to follow the 12 guidelines in [CDC's Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain](#). Recommendations from CDC include: consider using non-

pharmacological and non-opioid pharmacologic therapy to manage pain, discuss with patients the known risks and benefits of opioid therapy, when starting opioid therapy prescribe the lowest effective dosage and prescribe immediate-release opioids instead of extended-release/long-acting opioids, and avoid concurrent benzodiazepine and opioid prescribing.

The Medication Assisted Treatment Team:

1. Aims to increase the availability of Buprenorphine treatment for residents with opiate use disorders. The goal is to increase the number of physicians who are able and willing to prescribe Buprenorphine, and to assist those already “X” waived to begin or expand treating opiate dependent patients.
2. Can provide mentors and protocols available for prescribers interested in expanding into Buprenorphine therapy. For more information regarding this resource contact Katie Dolezal, NP: kdolezal@co.slo.ca.us.

The Naloxone Action Team:

1. Aims to increase availability of the opiate reversal medication Naloxone in throughout the county.
2. Encourages prescribers to co-prescribe Naloxone to high risk patients. **Medi-Cal [now covers](#) the form of Naloxone that is a single unit nasal spray.**
3. Is increasing the number of Overdose Prevention Educators in the community to train others in the use of Naloxone to save more lives. To inquire about an Educator for training purposes contact Julianne Schmidt, LMFT: jschmidt@co.slo.ca.us.

The Community Prevention Action Team:

1. Provides you with a copy of a [poster](#) to utilize in your clinic/office setting to educate patients on the safe disposal of prescription and over the counter medication. You [can order larger posters and take-away informational cards](#) through the contact information below at no charge.

The Data & Outcome Measures Action Team:

1. Provides an enclosed copy of the [San Luis Obispo County Rx Opioid Abuse Report Card](#).
2. Encourages providers and the public to visit *San Luis Obispo County Data Report on Opioids* at www.opioidsafetySLO.org for local opioid data and info on the coalition as a whole.

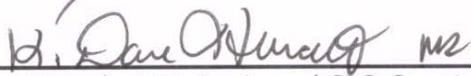
To join any of our Action Teams, or to learn more about the SLO Opioid Safety Coalition, please contact the Coordinator Julianne Schmidt at jschmidt@co.slo.ca.us or 781-4858.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and the health and safety of all our citizens.

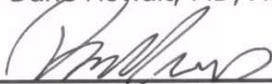
Sincerely,



Penny Borenstein, MD, County Health Officer/Public Health Director



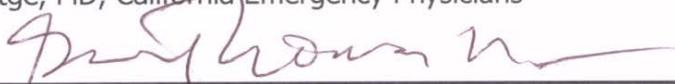
K. Dane Howalt, MD, Aegis and SLO County Jail Physician



Brian Koch, MD, Central Coast Emergency Physicians



Stefan Teitge, MD, California Emergency Physicians



Greg Thomas, MD, Cal Poly Health Center Physician and SLO County Drug & Alcohol MAT Program Physician