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Springfield Organizations Work Together to Combat Opioid Epidemic

SPRINGFIELD, OHIO – September 22, 2017 – The City of Springfield’s Fire Rescue/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Division and Police Division, McKinley Hall and the Springfield Regional Medical Center are working together to improve the protocol currently utilized in responding to drug overdoses, specifically the opioid epidemic.

“A more long-term program has proven to be more effective than a model of aggressive resuscitation,” said Fire Rescue Division Chief Nick Heimlich. “Our focus in working together with the Police Division and McKinley Hall has been to care for the addict, not just to treat the symptoms of an overdose.”

In February 2017, the Springfield Police Division and Fire Rescue/EMS Division began working with McKinley Hall CEO Wendy Doolittle on a joint project to address opioid abuse in Springfield. This collaboration has brought about a new plan to deal with opioid overdoses, from the first responders on the scene to what will happen to the patients several weeks after they overdose.

The first step in the changing response is that first responders on the scene slow down the resuscitation process. Patients are brought to stabilization as quickly as possible, but are not revived to full consciousness until they arrive at the hospital. This allows responders to get patients out of dangerous environments where they could potentially refuse further treatment.

After the patient arrives at the hospital and is admitted, the emergency room uses a protocol designed by Dr. Narinder Saini, medical director of the Medication Assisted Treatment program at McKinley Hall. The protocol involves using selected medications that assist overdose victims with the detoxification process, allowing them to seamlessly transfer to services at McKinley Hall where they can continue to engage in a medication assisted treatment program.

In addition to the detoxification process, a peer support specialist employed by McKinley Hall meets the patients at Springfield Regional Medical Center’s Emergency Department. The counselor talks to the patient about potential next steps and, with consent, the patient is either admitted to the hospital for detoxification or is given medication to take with them.

An additional step in the process is a Safehouse that McKinley Hall plans to open on September 1. The Safehouse is not a medical facility but will be staffed by recovery technicians 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Patients will be able to stay in the Safehouse for up to 12 days until a treatment facility is identified and they can transfer there directly without having to go back into a drug-using environment.



“The most important part of this process is giving them a plan and letting them know that their withdrawal symptoms will be addressed,” Doolittle said. “We get them out of the environment in which they were using [opiates] and bring them somewhere safe where they can start to recover.”

Funding to employ the supports necessary for this process came from Ohio Senator Robert Portman’s 21st Century CURES initiative, a \$6.3 billion medical innovation package that is designed to accelerate the discovery, development and delivery of new cures and treatments for opioid addiction.

Initially, Captain Brad Moos of the Springfield Police Division worked with Doolittle to apply for the funding. Later in the process, the Mental Health and Recovery Board of Clark, Greene and Madison Counties secured the funding and provided additional match to fund a therapist at the emergency room as well as the Safehouse.

The Police Division has also received another grant in collaboration with Prosecutor Andrew Wilson of the Ohio Attorney General’s office and Chief Heimlich. This grant will fund a designated officer whose primary responsibility will be to work with addicts, their families and supporting organizations.

“The important thing is that we are actively working to address this problem in our community,” Moos said. “Often, the only news people hear about the opioid crisis is the seriousness of this epidemic. It’s important to show communities what their local organizations are doing in response so they know what resources are available.”

The Clark County Substance Abuse and Treatment Coalition also applied for and received the Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) grant. This grant has allowed McKinley Hall to distribute Naloxone kits to families and friends of addicts and train them on how to use the kits in the event of an overdose. Over 200 kits have been distributed in Clark County.

“There is no magic bullet to deal with this epidemic,” said Doolittle. “We have to continuously be creative in our approach to motivate addicts to seek help, especially after an overdose. There is not one process that will reach every single person, but we are hopeful that we can increase our reach by modifying our tactics as a community.”

For more information about McKinley Hall, visit www.mckinleyhall.org.

For more information about the Springfield Regional Medical Center, visit www.mercy.com/springfield/locations/hospitals/springfield-medical-center.

For more information about the City of Springfield, visit www.springfieldohio.gov.

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