

Jackson County Opioid Awareness County Leadership Forum Joint Meeting of Local Government Entities Summary Report

The Jackson County Opioid Awareness County Leadership Forum was held on Monday, April 23, 2018 from 6:00 until 9:15 pm at the Jackson County Department on Aging Center, Heritage Room. Approximately 100 people attended including County, State and Municipal elected officials and executive staff; NC House of Representative Mike Clampitt; Board of Education members and Superintendent; District Attorney and Superior and District Court Judges; Department of Public Health; Department of Social Services; Jackson County Sheriff's Office, Sylva Police Department and Western Carolina University Police Department; Rehabilitation Organizations and Chief Medical Officer and Directors; Emergency Medical Services; local prevention services representatives; CEO and Emergency Department physician from local hospital and Southwestern Community College and Western Carolina University.

Jackson County Commissioner Chairman Brian McMahan welcomed everyone to the forum and recognized elected officials in attendance. The local government entities in attendance were Jackson County Board of Commissioners, Town of Dillsboro, Town of Sylva, Town of Webster and Village of Forest Hills. Chairman McMahan recognized Don Adams, County Manager and Shelley Carraway, Public Health Director.

Don Adams shared the goals and purpose of the forum is to educate local elected leadership with basic information regarding opioids and substance abuse; to discuss the impact on the county; to have rehabilitation professionals share successful prevention and treatment programs and to discuss effective education, prevention and treatment resources available in our county. Mr. Adams encouraged anyone that would like to become directly involved to contact Ms. Carraway regarding next steps. Ms. Carraway introduced the panelist.

Dr. Craig Martin, Vaya Health Chief Medical Officer, presented an overview of opioids and how abuse of opioids has increased over the years. Dr. Martin discussed addiction and the struggles that addicts encounter with any substance abuse. Dr. Martin shared an overview of dopamine, a neurotransmitter, one of the chemicals responsible for transmitting signals in between the nerve cells of the brain. Some dopamine nerve cells become activated when something good happens, most abused drugs cause the release of dopamine and this is thought to contribute to their addictive properties.

Shelley Carraway, Jackson County Department of Public Health Director, gave a presentation on Opioids in Jackson County-A Public Health Perspective which included state, regional and county substance abuse, and overdose and death statistics. Ms. Carraway discussed the increase in Acute Hepatitis C cases, Drug Withdrawal Syndrome in newborns in our state, increase in Sepsis, State Legislation regarding opioid abuse, various local substance abuse prevention items in place such as Lock your Meds Campaign, Take Back Events, Prescription Drop Box and the community action team of the Healthy Carolinians of Jackson County.

Jennifer Abshire, Jackson County Department of Social Services Director, gave a presentation on Protecting Opioids' Youngest Victims in Jackson County sharing information about children in our county testing positive at birth for numerous substances, infants going through withdrawal requiring longer hospital stays, being born prematurely due to substance abuse, children remaining in Foster Care longer

and fewer children in Foster Care being reunited with their parents. There has been a significant increase in all the aforementioned in Jackson County in the last five years. Currently, there are 14 open cases involving substantiated “abuse” or “neglect”, and 12 of the 14 cases are due to substance use.

Chip Hall, Sheriff of Jackson County, informed the forum this is a very important issue that has impacted many families in our county and throughout Western North Carolina. Sheriff Hall stated the STOP Act has made an impact on prescription drug availability on the street; however, individuals will turn to buying pills illegally or turn to other drugs such as heroin. The Narcan Program has decreased the number of overdose deaths. Narcan is a prescription drug shown to counter the effects of an opioid overdose. Narcan is also a tool that can be administered to an officer should they become contaminated and their co-workers know how to use it.

Matthew Burrell, Harris Emergency Medical Services Manager, gave a presentation on Opioid Awareness: Naloxone (Narcan) which included facts about Narcan, methods of administration and indicators to EMS personnel if Narcan is needed. The number of overdose calls doubled over a two year period, and number of patients administered Narcan doubled over that same two year period. All volunteer fire departments, all law enforcement agencies and all first responders in our county have been issued Narcan and trained in its use. Mr. Burrell shared a video on how to administer Narcan.

Shelley Carraway introduced community professionals who shared some insight from their perspective.

Susannah Koppers, Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Western Carolina University Counseling and Psychological Services shared they provide mental health and substance abuse counseling services to students. Catamounts for Recovery provides a safe and supportive space for like-minded Catamounts to come together in a community that encourages each other to pursue a rich and successful collegiate experience in sustained recovery from drugs, alcohol and addictive behavior.

Dr. Melissa Hamm, Director of Behavioral Health Urgent Care and Adult Recovery Unit at Appalachian Community Services-Balsam shared they recently opened a Behavioral Urgent Care where people can go for help with behavioral health or substance abuse crisis. The Urgent Care is open from Monday at 7:00 am continuously through Friday at 7:00 pm, their goal is to be open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week soon. They are a 16 bed in-patient facility treating individuals with substance abuse and mental health issues.

Dr. Matt Holmes, Associate Medical Director at Meridian Behavioral Health Services stated he is a psychiatrist trained in mental health and addiction. Dr. Holmes shared in his experience, treatment that included medication appeared to save more lives and help the individual remain substance free. Dr. Holmes feels there is a lot of stigma around mental illness and even more associated with addiction.

Mike Clampitt, North Carolina House of Representative for our region presented the STOP (Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention) Act overview. The STOP Act passed unanimously in both houses of the General Assembly on June 28, 2017 and was signed by Governor Roy Cooper on June 29, 2017. The Act targeted Schedule I and Schedule II Opioids to limit first time prescriptions for acute pain to less than 5 days and following surgical procedure to less than 7 days. Also required Controlled Substance Reporting System (CSRS) check for the first time and every 90 days if prescription continues, and review patient information in CSRS for past 12 months and record check in medical record. DHHS will conduct periodic audits, report violations to licensing boards and boards may suspend or revoke prescribers’ licenses. Representative Clampitt is in favor of Needle Exchange Program and is working on a mobile vehicle for

Region 1 that would be staffed with volunteers. Information regarding Hepatitis C, Staph infection, AIDS and diabetes would be discussed during needle exchange.

Judge Bradley Letts, Senior Resident Superior Court Judge for District 30B, discussed how imprisonment has not significantly reduced substance abuse and is not likely to be an effective national drug control and prevention strategy. It appears that no matter how much jail time someone receives if they do not learn to make better and different choices, they will be back in jail. Judge Letts stated “You cannot lock folks up to sobriety”, people need to be sober or drug free first and then be treated for any other mental health issues. Judge Letts would like for community leaders to look at the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. LEAD will divert low-level offenders into a community based treatment and support services including housing, healthcare, job training, treatment and mental health support instead of processing them through traditional criminal justice system avenues. The Waynesville Police Department received a three year grant and are using the LEAD program to give offenders the option of drug treatment instead of going through the court system. Grant funds for LEAD programs are still available, and he would welcome the opportunity to use the program in his courtroom.

Patti Tiberi, Mountain Projects Prevention Coordinator, presentation covered community issues need community solutions. Ms. Tiberi would like to see the community recognize those that have experienced trauma, as untreated trauma creates more trauma, and recognize who needs extra support to be successful. Ms. Tiberi discussed prevention and treatment options in our community.

A question and answer session was held with elected leaders and audience members participating, numerous valuable questions and comments were heard. The panelist and community professionals were available to answer questions during this session as well as after the forum ended.

Closing remarks were made by Mr. Adams who reiterated the goals and purpose of the forum and encouraged anyone that would like to become directly involved to contact Ms. Carraway. Mr. Adams made everyone aware of a resource table that had contact information for all forum participants and information regarding substance abuse education, treatment and prevention options available in our community. Ms. Carraway shared this was an attempt to provide education for everyone as we charge forward in this epidemic; she also reminded everyone of the Healthy Carolinians task force that is in place and encouraged their participation. Chairman McMahan stated it had been a great evening with a lot of information and he hoped it could be the start to moving forward in looking for ways to address the problem as a community. He would like to ensure the younger people are making smarter choices and sees funding as a big issue and they needed to make sure they were funding the programs that were making a difference.