

The Opioid Epidemic



November 2017

Background

Awareness of opioid dependence disorder has risen in the U.S. at a rate parallel to the ongoing epidemic itself. Indexed web searches for the term “opioid epidemic” increased from zero to 100 between July 2014 and August 2017, indicating a 100-fold increase in the popularity of the issue inside of a three-year span. Despite the increased awareness of opioid misuse and prescribing patterns that often result in addiction and substitution with illicit opioids, overdose deaths in the U.S. continue to soar. In Kansas between 2013 and 2015, overdose deaths for prescription opioids increased by 28 percent, while heroin deaths increased by 71 percent during the same period.

Talking Points

Alliances and partnerships among health care providers and payers, business leaders and policy makers, and patients and caregivers, are essential to identify community-based solutions and broader policy changes to address the opioid epidemic. For example, increased utilization of the prescription drug monitoring program in Kansas (KTRACs); education regarding alternative therapies to treat injury and pain; increased awareness and utilization of opioid prescribing guidelines; and work and vocational rehabilitation programs.

Kansas was a leader in creating KTRACs, a state-based, prescription drug monitoring program, launched in 2010. The Kansas Hospital Association was supportive of the creation of KTRACs. KHA promotes the use of KTRACs to prevent the misuse of opioids, controlled substances and other drugs of concern.

The Kansas Hospital Association and the Kansas Medical Society are leaders in providing health care quality improvement education and technical assistance to hospitals and physicians. KHA and KMS founded the Kansas Healthcare Collaborative, in 2008 to be a trusted resource for meaningful health care quality improvement education, evaluation and measurement, and continually enhance care provided to Kansans.

The Kansas Healthcare Collaborative, through the Practice Transformation Network (PTN) and Hospital Improvement Innovation Network (HIIN), has provided support and education to Kansas hospitals and physicians on safe prescribing practices, including work to reduce adverse drug events associated with opioids.

The Kansas Hospital Association has been working with hospitals and other stakeholders, including the Kansas Medical Society, to assess opioid-related health care utilization and potential misuse and abuse in Kansas. KHA and KMS are in continued discussions regarding further educational offerings that build upon the work through the PTN and HIIN.

The Kansas Hospital Association has been engaged with the CMS Region VII office on this important issue, including attending the CMS Regions V and VII Opioid Collaborative on Nov. 2; and meeting with CMS Administrator Seema Verma on Nov. 6 at the CMS Region VII office in Kansas City.

Resources to address the opioid crisis must be strategically allocated for workforce development, vocational rehabilitation and substance-use disorder treatment. Services covered by federal funds recently made available to states through the 21st Century Cures Act should be evaluated for effectiveness and targeted to areas in most need. (The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration will award nearly \$1 billion in new grants to address the nation’s opioid crisis.)