

# MAHEC Distributes Opioid Awareness Flyer to 171 Schools Across Western North Carolina

*E. Blake Fagan, Claire Kane*

**To the Editor**—In response to the invited commentary “Fighting the Opioid Epidemic in North Carolina with Leadership, Compassion, and Creativity: Community Approaches” featured in the May 2018 edition of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*, the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) in Asheville would like to share a creative strategy our organization has used to raise awareness about the opioid crisis in North Carolina.

In partnership with the Buncombe County Health Department, MAHEC has created an opioid awareness flyer for parents of middle and high school students with information on how to prevent prescription opioid addiction and overdose in teens and how to dispose of unused opioids. MAHEC has targeted teens for this educational effort in light of data demonstrating that more than 90% of adults with substance use disorders started using before age 18 [1]. In addition, teens who received a prescription for opioid pain medication by grade 12 were at a 33% increased risk of misusing an opioid between ages 19 and 25 [2].

The front of the two-sided flyer includes questions that parents should ask health care providers before their children are prescribed opioids. It also lists which over-the-counter medications provide effective and non-addictive pain relief and what to do if parents notice signs of substance use disorder in their child. The back of the flyer provides instructions on how to safely dispose of unused opioids via drop boxes or last-resort strategies such as mixing unused opioids with coffee grounds or cat litter when drop boxes are not available.

As of the first of September, flyers had been distributed in all middle and high schools in 14 out of the 16 counties that MAHEC serves, totaling 171 schools. School nurses, counselors, athletic directors, teachers, principals, and superintendents have all played an active role in distributing these flyers

and using them to engage in conversation around this topic. The flyers have also been distributed to middle and high schools outside of the AHEC region in Stokes, Rockingham, and Forsyth (Winston-Salem) counties. We are continuing to distribute these flyers throughout the remaining three counties in our mountain region as well as the rest of the state, and we welcome partners in this effort.

To download a copy of the flyer for your own distribution, please visit <https://mahec.net/studentawareness> and email [opioideducation@mahec.net](mailto:opioideducation@mahec.net) with any questions. **NCMJ**

**E. Blake Fagan, MD** chief education officer, MAHEC, Asheville, North Carolina; interim medical director, MAHEC Division of Family Medicine, Asheville, North Carolina; assistant residency director, MAHEC Family Medicine Residency Program; professor, Department of Family Medicine, University of North Carolina Health Sciences at MAHEC, Asheville, North Carolina.

**Claire Kane, BA** Davidson impact fellow, Asheville, North Carolina.

## Acknowledgment

Potential conflicts of interest. E.B.F. and C.K. have no relevant conflicts of interest.

## References

1. Center on Addiction. Adolescent Substance Use: America's #1 Public Health Problem. <https://www.centeronaddiction.org/addiction-research/reports/adolescent-substance-use-america%E2%80%99s-1-public-health-problem>. Published June 2011. Accessed September 19, 2018.
2. Miech R, Johnston L, O'Malley P, Keyes KM, Heard K. Prescription opioids in adolescence and future opioid misuse. *Pediatrics*. 2015;136(5):e1169-e1177.

Electronically published January 14, 2019.

Address correspondence to Claire Kane, 121 Hendersonville Rd, Regional Services, Asheville, NC 28803 ([opioideducation@mahec.net](mailto:opioideducation@mahec.net)).

**N C Med J. 2019;80(1):63.** ©2019 by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine and The Duke Endowment. All rights reserved. 0029-2559/2019/80115

# The danger of addiction is closer than you think...



A growing number of students are becoming addicted to painkillers after being prescribed painkillers for an injury. Commonly prescribed opioids are: Vicodin, Oxycodone or Percocet. Heroin is also an opioid.

Opioids can be addictive and dangerous. People aged 12 - 49 who became dependent on prescription painkillers were 19 times more likely to have used heroin.<sup>1</sup>

We need your help to fight prescription painkiller addiction and overdose. It only takes a little to lose a lot.

## TALK BEFORE YOU TAKE.

While your child may have a real need for pain medication, new research shows that often times the best pain relief is found through over-the-counter drugs, which are effective and are not addictive.

## 500 MG TYLENOL & 200 MG IBUPROFEN

taken together every 6 hours up to 4x per day with food and water reduces severe pain for most people.



## AS A PARENT OR STUDENT ASK QUESTIONS.

*"What are the side effects of this medication?"*

*"Do I have to finish taking all of these pills?"*

*"When can I switch to acetaminophen and ibuprofen?"*



## Parents can help stop addiction and overdoses.

- Work with your child's friend group to keep them upbeat as they heal. Traumatic events and depression can be connected to addiction.
- Children who learn about the risks of drugs at home are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs than those who do not get that message from their parents.<sup>2</sup>
- Count and secure prescriptions in your home. Drop off unused pills at an RX Drop box. Ask your friends and family members to do the same.
- Signs of substance use disorder include: changes in mood, grades, weight; lack of energy; red, watery eyes; large or small pupils; cold, shaky hands; running nose; poor physical coordination; puffy face or paleness. However, sometimes there are no physical signs of substance use disorder.
- School nurses and guidance counselors are trusted members of the school community where students can turn for help - either for themselves or a friend.
- If you suspect your child might be addicted to an opioid, talk to your child's healthcare provider right away or call VAYA at 1-800-849-6127 and ask how to get Narcan to help prevent overdose.

If you would like to learn more about MAHEC's opioid education initiatives, please email [opioideducation@mahec.net](mailto:opioideducation@mahec.net).

1. Rudd RA, Seth P, David F, Scholl L. Increases in Drug and Opioid-Involved Overdose Deaths — United States, 2010–2015. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm650501e1>  
2. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Misuse of prescription drugs. 2006 Retrieved from: <http://oas.samhsa.gov/prescription/toc.htm>.

# What should you do with unused opioids?



1. **LOCK** them up



2. Take them to a permanent disposal (**DROP** box)

[rxdrugdropbox.org](http://rxdrugdropbox.org) to find locations



3. Add **COFFEE GROUNDS** or **CAT LITTER** and water to a pill bottle and throw it away



4. If you are unable to do any of these things, **FLUSH** them

**LOCK OR DROP OR ADD COFFEE GROUNDS OR LASTLY FLUSH OR CAT LITTER**