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f: Downingtown Area Communities That Care

NAME

ADDRESS – LINE 1

ADDRESS – LINE 2

Dear Doctor _____,

Communities that Care (CTC) of Greater Downingtown is a community coalition made up of several sectors within the community; it follows a mobilization process that works with parents, schools and community organizations to empower youth to make positive choices to reach their full potential. This includes avoiding the use of alcohol and drugs...all drugs, from nicotine and marijuana to heroin and prescription narcotics. To that end, the CTC is partnering with Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing (PROP), an organization of individuals leading the way in responsible opioid prescribing advocacy and education. It is important that as healthcare providers, we are fully informed of the risks and benefits of prescribing opioids.

In 2015, seventy-one individuals died of a drug overdose in Chester County. Only TEN of those deaths did not involve a narcotic. Thirty-six of those deaths involved heroin (with or without other drugs), and twenty-five involved a prescription opioid. Prescription opioids may be obtained legitimately from a healthcare provider following a surgical procedure or injury, found in a friend's or family member's medicine cabinet, or legally prescribed unused medication may be diverted to be sold on the street. Thus, any prescription written for any patient has the potential to be abused.

According to a 2011 study, almost 40% of youth use prescription type opioids prior to using heroin (1). The Narcotics Overdose Prevention Education (NOPE) Taskforce, which defines their mission to include education, treatment support, support for families, and advocacy, list the following sobering statistics on their website at <http://www.nopetaskforce.org/facts.php>:

- Every day 2,000 teens in the United States try prescription drugs to get high for the first time.
- 60% of teens who have abused prescription painkillers did so before age 15.
- 45% of those who use prior to the age of 15 will later develop an addiction.
- More than 29 percent of teens in treatment are dependent on tranquilizers, sedatives, amphetamines, and other stimulants (all types of prescription drugs).
- 12 to 17 year olds abuse prescription drugs more than they abuse ecstasy, crack/cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine combined.
- There are as many new abusers age 12 to 17 of prescription drugs as there are of marijuana

- Nearly half (49%) of all college students either binge drink, use illicit drugs or misuse prescription drugs.

To assist healthcare providers in providing evidence based, best practice care to patients, both the Pennsylvania Medical Society and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have released guidelines on opioid prescribing for physicians for chronic pain, emergency department use, obstetrics and gynecology, and geriatrics, as well as for dental providers and dispensing guidelines for pharmacists. The PA Medical Society also has a free Continuing Medical Education series focused on Responsible prescribing, and the availability of Naloxone for use by police departments and the community to reverse opioid overdoses. The guidelines and CME resources are available on the Pennsylvania Medical Society's website at www.pamedsoc.org/tools-you-can-use/topics/opioids/OpioidResources. The PA Medical Society also provides updates on the implementation of the prescription medication monitoring database that should be operational by late summer 2016. The CDC's recently released (March 18, 2016) opioid prescribing guidelines are available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/rr/rr6501e1er.htm>. For your convenience, a summary of those guidelines is included with this letter on a separate page.

Safe prescribing, at the very least, includes the following:

1. Screening patients for substance abuse problems before prescribing opioids
2. Prescribing the lowest effective opioid dose for the shortest period of time
3. Considering co-prescribing naloxone, especially if risk of overdose is high
4. Monitoring the patient closely, scheduling follow-up and referring for substance abuse treatment if needed.

As a physician, a CTC member and the mother of two teenaged daughters, I urge you to review your opioid prescribing practices and the available guidelines and consider how you can help decrease the opioid abuse and overdose epidemic. Thank you so much for helping to make the greater Downtown area an even better place to raise our families! For more information on Communities that Care of Greater Downtown, please visit www.dtownctc.org.

Kind regards,



Kimberly E. Stone, MD, MPH, FAAP

Resources:

1. Pollini et al. Problematic use of prescription-type opioids prior to heroin use among young heroin injectors. *Substance Abuse and Rehabilitation*. 2011; 2:173-180
2. Dowell D, Haegerich TM, Chou R. CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain — United States, 2016. *MMWR Recomm Rep* 2016;65:1–49. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.rr6501e1>.