



Morrison County Prescription Drug Task Force - Sheriff's Office

Initiative Story

This program started with CHI St. Gabriel's recognizing that a high percentage of their Emergency Room visits were related to narcotic seeking (pain complaints). The Hospital applied for and was granted a SIM Grant that allowed them to hire a Social Worker and Nurse to help manage patients on narcotic pain medication. As part of this program, they requested other community stakeholder to come together every month to discuss what problems we were facing in the community related to narcotic usage and what we could do as a community to combat this problem. The stakeholders included: Morrison County Sheriff's Office, Morrison County Attorney's Office, Morrison County Community Corrections, Morrison County Social Services, Little Falls Police Department, CHI St. Gabriel's, Family Medical Center, Little Falls Community Schools, local home care providers, and local pharmacy managers.

As far as law enforcements role in this initiative, we started noticing an increase in the use of heroin in the Morrison County area. We were also noting that numerous individuals selling prescription narcotics. We had an increase in the amount of heroin we were purchasing in undercover operations. In debriefs with arrested dealers/users, we noted that the majority, if not all of them, started with abusing prescription drugs, specifically opioids. We then started to have deaths related to overdoses of heroin and prescription opioids. In a smaller rural community, it didn't take long to notice that we had an issue.

The Morrison County Sheriff's Office decided to become involved in this task force to help combat the rising opioid issues in our communities. When we became involved, we had a new Sheriff and I was newly assigned as an investigator on our Violent Crime Enforcement Team (VCET). We both were open to trying new ideas and both believed in education, community partnerships and working as a community to face this problem. We did not want to see our community dying because of drug overdoses and we wanted to combat, not only drug use, but the crime that is associated with it. Prior to the prescription drug task force and the ability to have local treatment options for opioid addicts, we had little that we could do other than enforce the laws and jail people.

We believed that through these community partnerships, we could:

- Educate the public;
- Work with the schools;
- Help the doctors to understand what we were seeing on the streets; and,
- Come together with all of the stakeholders above to ensure a safer, healthier community.

Program Intent

The prescription drug task force meets monthly to work together as a community to come up with ways to combat the rising opioid issues. We also have worked together to put those ideas into practice. The clinic has two doctors who are now certified by the DEA to provide Suboxone to heroin and opioid addicts. The clinic and hospital have worked together to track patients receiving opioid pain medication and worked to ensure that pills are used properly and also offer alternative treatment options.

We have held numerous forums and educational presentations at the schools to educate our youth. We have initiated 'Coffee with a Cop' meetings to allow the public to come and meet with law enforcement officials and discuss community issues. We have participated in "Drug Take Back" programs and worked to get unused pills off the streets. Law enforcement has worked closely with our local community correction agents to share info that is gained from their work and that intelligence exchange has assisted the VCET in locating individuals that are selling and using illegal narcotics.

Implementation

CHI St. Gabriel's Foundation applied for and received grant funding to start many of the programs that are initiated by the Prescription Task Force. Some of us traveled to Washington, D.C. to provide a briefing to congressional staff on our program to try and secure more funding to the State to initiate more programs like this. The program has since received additional State funding to help keep the program going.

Results

We have seen a huge reduction in the amount of prescription pills that have been prescribed in our County. We have had an increase in the number of unused medications turned in to law enforcement. We have had an increase in abusers seeking and receiving treatment for opioid addiction. We have also had a huge increase in other communities wanting to be a part of this and attending training sessions to learn how to provide a program like this in other medical communities.

Lessons Learned

Though I cannot speak on every aspect of this initiative -- as I am more on the law enforcement side of it; I can speak on some of those issues:

- It takes open communication with your community partners. As law enforcement we need to share what we see on the streets with those prescribing opioids. Doctors can learn a lot from the damage we see from opioid addiction.
- It takes time. You need to be able to commit time to working together. You also need time to see the results. This issue won't get fixed overnight. It takes time for all of us working together to combat an issue that has a huge hold on people.
- Some are unwilling to change practices. We have noted that some doctors and pharmacies continue in what were common practices and it takes some time to get them to come to your side, if you will.
- Changing law enforcement's view on addiction can be difficult. A lot of officers see it as their job to lock people up and see drug users as junkies. Changing their understanding on how opioids affect people takes time and isn't the easiest. Getting an opioid user clean and giving them hope can change their life and, in turn, decrease the amount of time that we spend chasing them and decrease the number of axillary crimes that they commit because of their addiction.

Contact Information

I am more than willing to answer questions regarding my role in this initiative. CHI St. Gabriel's has the best knowledge on applying for funding and providing education from the medical side. I can certainly refer questions, as needed.

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