SMOKY MOUNTAIN MCO

News You Can Use

Your monthly resource for news and information about behavioral health and intellectual/ developmental disabilities in western North Carolina and beyond

CEO Spotlight with Smoky CEO Brian Ingraham

Sometimes, it's the simple things in life that bring the most wide-reaching change. As of 2 p.m. on June 20, pharmacies statewide may dispense the overdose-reversal drug naloxone – often sold as NARCAN® – without a prescription. The naloxone bill received unanimous bipartisan support in the Legislature and from Governor Pat McCrory. North Carolina is now the third state in the nation to use a statewide standing order to make the drug available to the general public at pharmacies.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege to serve on the Governor's Task Force on Mental Health and Substance Use and co-chair the Prescription Opioid Abuse and Heroin Resurgence Subcommittee. Right away, my colleagues and I saw an urgent need to increase access to naloxone, a key recommendation of our final report. In western North Carolina, Smoky was able to fund the purchase of more than 2,600 NARCAN® kits as part of our Reinvest 2016 Community Reinvestment Plan. Already, our partners at the N.C. Harm Reduction Coalition report that our contribution has reversed at least 19 overdoses and been used to equip seven local law enforcement agencies with NARCAN® kits.

Naloxone is an invaluable tool in saving lives. We know naloxone alone won't end the opioid epidemic. But it's important to note an overdose reversal also provides an opportunity to make major life changes. It's a wake-up call. And, because naloxone sends individuals who are dependent on opioids into sudden withdrawal, the experience is often unpleasant, even painful.

More than a few individuals are living in recovery today because someone had naloxone at the right place and the right time. Others might not be ready to enter into recovery, at least not yet, due to the nature of addiction. They, too, deserve more than one shot.

Access to services is as essential as ever. Treatment should include a long-term recovery plan that guides supports and services. The plan may include Medication-Assisted Treatment, such as buprenorphine. Peer support and support groups can give hope and motivation. Recovery is difficult when a person's basic needs aren't met, so we're working at Smoky to expand recovery housing and employment options.

Since 2013, naloxone has saved more than 3,200 lives in North Carolina. The new legislation will save countless more. For those individuals who receive a second chance at life, let's make sure we're there when needed to offer the support, guidance and resources to help them build a better future.

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