

# News You Can Use

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

## From the doctor: with Associate Medical Director John Nicholls



Spring is the perfect time to quote the ever-wise baseball icon Yogi Berra. Berra said, “You can observe a lot by watching.”

In 2014, we watched more than 28,000 people die from opioid overdoses. Almost 1,400 North Carolinians died from drug

overdoses the same year. If observation implies a closer look, with an aim to solve a problem, what can we observe?

One, we can observe many deaths are preventable. The American Society of Addiction Medicine reports up to 72 percent of opioid and heroin users do not receive medication-assisted treatment despite good evidence supporting its use. While it doesn’t cure addiction, the combination of opioid replacement with therapy can help break the cycle of addiction and save lives.

We at Smoky support the use of medication-assisted treatment, in which individuals in recovery receive proven medications such as buprenorphine or

methadone to manage opioid dependence while simultaneously participating in programs such as outpatient therapy or recovery self-help groups. We continue to offer Medicaid coverage to more than 1,000 people with opioid dependence so they can responsibly pursue a better, brighter future.

Medication-assisted treatment is only one tool available to end this crisis. In March, we provided \$100,000 to distribute 2,600 opioid overdose reversal kits throughout western North Carolina. We were a proud sponsor of and participant in the March Heroin Summit in Asheville, put on by the U.S. Attorney’s Office. We also encourage responsible opioid prescribing practices through clinical guidance and oversight within our region.

We want to effect change right here, in the communities we serve. This includes encouraging more people to seek out and participate in treatment and helping bring more addiction treatment providers into the region. We and others are taking steps in the right direction and will take many more. As Yogi also said, “It ain’t over till it’s over.”

