

## What is needed to assist in addressing the Opioid crisis?

New initiatives and improved healthcare delivery systems and approaches are needed both in jail and in the free world in order to combat the opioid epidemic. Revisions to public policy could remove barriers to providing needed care to opioid addicted patients. Our recommendations include the following:

- Establishment in jails of centralized “detox units” to provide for centralized monitoring of patients undergoing opioid withdrawal.
- Expansion of the use of a buprenorphine taper or maintenance to prevent or reduce opioid withdrawal symptoms and risks.
- Increased understanding on the part of providers on the risks of opioid withdrawal and the benefits of using buprenorphine to mitigate these risks.
- Increased flexibility and support on the part of correctional partners and regulators to facilitate use of a buprenorphine taper during the supervised withdrawal process (and buprenorphine maintenance for pregnant, opioid-addicted patients).
- Increase in the use of electrolyte containing fluids (orally or intravenously as indicated) to maintain hydration and electrolyte balance for patients undergoing supervised opioid withdrawal.
- Increased efforts to prevent opioids from being illegally smuggled into jails and prisons.
- Increased focus on discharge planning and services to educate patients being released from jail on the increased risk of overdose upon release, and options for treatment, education, counseling and the full range of medication assisted treatment (MAT) approaches.
- Increased access to drug addiction therapy, counseling and support services from community providers while in jail;
- Increased opportunities for half-way houses, treatment programs, and other creative approaches upon release from jail to prevent inmates from re-entering environments that are likely to lead to the recurring pattern of drug-using behavior and recidivism.

## **Mercer County**

The only program the Mercer County Sheriff's Office has is we have what we call the Rapid Response Team. This team is comprised of myself, the head of the Mercer County EMA and a member of Foundations, our local mental health provider.

Within one week of any overdose we make an attempt to do a home visit of the individual and sign them up for a treatment program for alcohol/drugs, as well as giving them information regarding local programs and assistance. We do not discuss the criminal aspect of their cases, if there is one.

While most individuals refuse assistance, we have been successful in signing up a few for treatment.