

Press Release

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: On the Opioid Crisis and Increase of Infectious Diseases

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) some communities that have been hardest hit by the opioid crisis have also seen associated increases in hepatitis B and C and other infections such as endocarditis, septic arthritis and abscesses, driven by increases in the numbers of people who inject opioids.

The opioid crisis in the United States is devastating the lives of millions of Americans. The numbers of injection-related infectious diseases is on the rise. Opioid overdose deaths increased fivefold from 1999 to 2016, and new hepatitis C infections more than tripled from 2010 to 2016.

Earlier this year, to address the infectious disease consequences of the opioid crisis, a public workshop titled Integrating Infectious Disease Considerations with Response to the Opioid Epidemic was convened to discuss the scope of the problem, giving particular attention to viral hepatitis, HIV, and endocarditis. Attention was given to reducing the infectious disease comorbidities of injection drug use, especially strategies that emphasize empathy, respectful treatment, and patient-centeredness. Speakers at the workshop presented on how the opioid epidemic has changed the epidemiology of infectious disease. In panel and open discussion, participants discussed strategies to prevent and treat infections in people who inject drugs, as well as strategies to identify patients who are present with these infections who are in need of treatment for their addiction.

One of HHS's top priorities is the implementation of a comprehensive five point national opioid strategy that includes the need to empower local communities to assess and respond to local needs, including both drivers and consequences of the opioid crisis, stressing the importance of addressing infectious diseases as part of an improved, comprehensive opioid response.

The opioid crisis has become part of a set of interconnected health problems, often called syndemics, because they have common root causes and interact synergistically, with one problem making the others worse. Because syndemics are interconnected, coordinated efforts are required across multiple programs and partners to successfully overcome the set of problems and their consequences. The Federal government recognizes that some of the best and most effective solutions will come from healthcare providers, community leaders and law enforcement who are dealing with the opioids and infectious diseases crisis on the ground.

Patient-centered strategies may be effective in reducing the infectious disease consequences of injection drug use, strategies that could be implemented using existing resources as well as those that require additional funding, and strategies that can work within and across the public health, healthcare and criminal justice systems. These strategies described by HHS could also help achieve the goals of the National HIV/AIDS Strategy and the National Viral Hepatitis Action Plan.

The workshop proceedings and proposed strategies can provide a springboard for intensified and informed discussions about effective approaches to support the integration of infectious disease prevention and treatment into our comprehensive opioid strategy at the federal, state and local levels.

The United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), also known as the Health Department, is a cabinet level department of the United States federal government whose goal is to protect the health of all Americans and provide essential human services.

To learn more about this workshop and the NYS Department of Health and Human Services please visit <https://www.hhs.gov/hepatitis/blog/2018/07/17/integrating-infectious-disease-prevention-and-treatment-into-the-opioid-response.html>.

The SAFE Glen Cove Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE" to educate and update the community regarding opioid use and its consequences. To learn more about the SAFE Glen Cove Coalition please follow us on www.facebook.com/safeglencovecoalition or visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic at www.safeglencove.org.

