

Press Release

February 4, 2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE CONTACT:

Dr. Sharon Harris 516- 676-2008

safeglencove@yahoo.com

SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: Opioid Epidemic America's Deadly New Normal

This week a U.S. News analysis showed the opioid epidemic evolved over three stages, cresting at its current high with no true end in sight. Despite myriad attempts to combat the crisis at the federal, state and local levels — including a White House declaration of a public health emergency, followed by an administrative announcement that America is "beginning to turn the tide" — the analysis shows the nation's opioid death rate is five times higher than it was in 1999, and is likely to remain there or climb even higher in years to come.

The U.S. News analysis examines opioid death rates for nearly two decades, far longer than short-term data regularly cited by policymakers when assessing the epidemic and the effectiveness of the public health response, maintaining that viewing the data over time offers a clearer view of how the crisis has progressed, and what to expect as it continues to unfold.

The epidemic's three waves — driven by a procession of legal and illicit opioids alike — have ricocheted across the country, creating a scenario in which Americans now are more likely to die from an opioid overdose than a car crash. By slicing the epidemic into phases, the analysis offers a glimpse into how America's ever-changing drug habit morphed into an all-consuming crisis:

From 1999 through 2006, the death rate rose steadily with the expanded use of prescription opioids, which exacerbated a long-smoldering heroin problem.

Starting in 2007, the death toll rose at a slower pace as knowledge about prescription-fueled addiction grew and legal action targeted the pharmaceutical industry.

In 2014 and the years since, as more lethal opioids — particularly the synthetic substance fentanyl — became increasingly accessible, the death toll began soaring to tragic new heights. In 2017, the age-adjusted opioid death rate reached 14.9 per 100,000 people, up from 2.9 in 1999.

Failures to detect the leveling off of the death toll more than a decade ago or to quickly recognize the subsequent surge in deaths were costly, translating to more lives lost.

The advent of the epidemic can be traced to OxyContin, the first formulation of opioid painkiller oxycodone that allowed for the medication's 12-hour release. Manufactured by Purdue Pharma,

OxyContin was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 1995 and is used to aid patients in moderate to severe pain, such as those recovering from operations or suffering from cancer.

Purdue Pharma's OxyContin marketing campaign was led by a sales force armed with research that downplayed the risks of addiction. Doctors and dentists, buoyed by the prospect of an effective, low-risk painkiller, began writing millions of prescriptions for the narcotic. A focus on the importance of improving pain control contributed to the flood of prescriptions. As opioid prescriptions began to soar, oversight authorities – including the FDA and Drug Enforcement Administration – and pharmaceutical distributors failed to recognize or raise red flags about potential abuse, experts say. In 2006 and 2007, for example, McKesson Corp., one of the largest drug distributors in the country, shipped more than 5.66 million opioid pills to a single pharmacy in a tiny town in rural West Virginia according to a congressional report released last month. The epidemic has particularly ravaged New England, Appalachia and parts of the Midwest, where social and economic decay in some states resulted in an explosion of deaths from drugs, alcohol and suicide. "The old notion was that if you were using opioids for a legitimate purpose, you couldn't become addicted," FDA Commissioner Dr. Scott Gottlieb says. "We now know that's not true. You can become addicted, even if the purpose of the prescription is appropriate."

U.S. News & World Report is an American media company that publishes news, opinion, consumer advice, rankings, and analysis. For more information, please visit www.usnews.com.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is a federal agency of the United States Department of Health and Human Services responsible for protecting and promoting public health. For more information please visit www.fda.gov.

SAFE, Inc. is the only alcohol and substance abuse prevention, intervention and education agency in the City of Glen Cove. Its Coalition is conducting an opioid prevention awareness campaign entitled, "Keeping Glen Cove SAFE," in order 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.