

Press Release

April 13, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: COVID-19 and the Opioid Epidemic

A recent article in Health Affairs discusses COVID's effect on the opioid epidemic. From July 2018 to July 2019, 67,410 died in the United States from drug overdose, 47,105 of those deaths—or 69%—were opioid-related, according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), who named Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) a public health crisis last year. Still, headlines about opioids have fallen behind those of coronavirus. The U.S. is now the country with the largest number of coronavirus virus cases at 325,185 with 9,368 fatalities. Further, people with OUD are less likely to live in situations conducive to social distancing, as this population is more likely to be homeless or incarcerated, according to the article.

For the 16 million people globally and 3 million people in the U.S. suffering from opioid use disorder (OUD), COVID-19 brings a host of issues: lack of face-to-face counseling services, methadone clinic shutdown and increased mortality risk from coronavirus from underlying respiratory damage.

Poverty and unemployment is highly correlated with opioid use disorder, according to a 2018 US Department of Health and Human Services study; as coronavirus wracks the economy with job loss and unemployment, opioid abuse could rise as the coronavirus crisis worsens.

Due to social distancing restrictions, traditional substance abuse recovery means like face-to-face counseling and rehabilitation clinics are unavailable, which has led to a push for virtual treatment options by Hazelden Betty Ford, the largest substance abuse non-profit in the country.

Methadone clinics—which function by doling out methadone prescribed by doctors to mitigate opioid withdrawal and cravings that lead to relapse—are unable to operate normally, as doing so would violate social distancing guidelines; recognizing this, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), is training patients for home methadone treatment and allowing telemedicine visits for buprenorphine users, another drug to treat OUD that previously required regular doctor visits.

For methadone clinics that continue to be open, people with OUD have expressed concern about failure to comply with social distancing guidelines, and risk of COVID-19 as a result of visiting the clinics.

Because opioids act by slowing breathing, people with OUD may have diminished lung capacity that could be deadly with the onset of COVID-19, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Last week the FDA authorized opioid manufacturers to produce and store over 65% more inventory to meet the demand by healthcare professionals for drugs like fentanyl, morphine and hydromorphone in treatment for COVID-19 patients, the implications of this for illegal use are unknown.

Health Affairs is a peer-reviewed healthcare journal established in 198. For more information please visit www.healthaffairs.org.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a federal agency that conducts and supports health promotion, prevention and preparedness activities in the United States, with the goal of improving overall public health. To learn more about the CDC please visit www.cdc.gov.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It is charged with improving the quality and availability of treatment and rehabilitative services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and the cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses. For more information about SAMHSA please visit www.samhsa.gov.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a United States federal-government research institute whose mission is to "lead the Nation in bringing the power of science to bear on drug abuse and addiction". For more information please visit www.drugabuse.gov.

The SAFE Glen Cove 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