

Press Release

June 1, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SAFE Glen Cove Coalition: COVID, the Opioid Epidemic and Real Time Data

Researchers at Washington University in St, Louis who are funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) are concerned about updated information as it relates to the two epidemics- opioid and COVID-19. As the Covid-19 epidemic monopolizes most of the health care system's treatment and prevention strategies, opioid overdose deaths continue. The opioid epidemic just a few months ago was considered to be the greatest public health crisis of this generation.

Members of the scientific community are concerned that 2019 data on the opioid epidemic will not be available until 2021 while within a few weeks from the time the first COVID cases were diagnosed in Wuhan, China, anyone with an internet connection could monitor the spread and effects. More importantly, elected leaders, scientists, and health care workers can see these data and use them to inform their responses and their choices of interventions in real time. This is enormously helpful. An intervention without such real-time outcome data is like working in the dark.

Covid-19 is a deadly plague, with more than 90,000 deaths in the U.S. since January 2020. Opioids are equally deadly, with approximately 450,000 lives lost to taking opioids between 1999 and 2017. In 2018 alone, there were 67,367 deaths involving opioids, and this breathtaking number actually reflected a slight improvement, as it was about 4% fewer than those lost in the year prior. Researchers maintain the closest thing they have to a real-time data system for opioid overdose deaths has a lag time of about 24 months and feel the consequences of not having real-time data for any public health crisis is lethal.

The long lag time for outcome data, which is not unique to Missouri, is completely unjustified. Missouri funds many substance use disorder treatment programs. In return for those funds, programs must send patient services and other claims information to the state's tracking system. In addition, the millions of federal dollars allocated to the state come with a requirement to collect outcome data on a regular basis. Add in hospital and overdose reversal data, which the state collects, and it should have ample

information to share with both taxpaying citizens and professionals working to stop overdose deaths from occurring. Most, if not all, of these data are generated by tax dollars and therefore belong to everyone.

Rather than publish belated findings in academic journals researchers suggest that a system should be created that makes outcome data available to everyone in something much closer to real time. The public has benefited from seeing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in the moment. This information helps bring clarity and accountability to an ongoing crisis that requires both. Bringing real-time outcome data to America's addiction crisis should also be made available to the public.

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 , visit SAFE's website to learn more about the Opioid Epidemic and COVID-19 at www.safeglencove.org.