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## **CORRECTED: Task force seeks to reduce abuse of pills, heroin**

By JORDAN CRAVENS

staff writer

Leaders have launched a task force to cut prescription drug and heroin abuse. And they want the community to join the effort.

The new Hancock County Prescription and Opiate Abuse Task Force is led by John Stanovich, assistant dean of the University of Findlay's College of Pharmacy.

"We are expecting a great deal of participation from community leaders and other community members to help formulate our plan," he said. "The idea of a task force helps us to have a better coordinated effort across a lot of different areas to address the issue of medication abuse."

Forged out of the Hancock County Community Partnership, the task force has been divided into four areas: community, health care professionals, education, and medication collection.

Community leaders will head the focus groups, Stanovich said, but they need people to join in.

The county task force formed about a month after Gov. Ted Strickland launched the Ohio Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force in April.

Strickland's group is "charged with researching the issue and identifying public health, law enforcement, legislative and additional strategies to reduce the danger of prescription drug abuse in Ohio."

Strickland said Ohio's unintentional drug poisoning death rate has increased more than 300 percent from 1999 to 2007. It's the leading cause of injury death in Ohio.

County Prosecutor Mark Miller and Kimberly Bash, program officer for the Findlay-Hancock County Community Foundation, are co-chairing the community focus area.

They will spearhead efforts to educate the public about opiate addiction and abuse, which will include tracking and reporting county and city statistics about drug use, deaths, and how many babies are born with addiction.

Creating awareness of treatment options, and communicating ways to decrease the drug problem are also among their tasks.

Barb Wilhelm, Findlay's deputy health commissioner, and Dr. William Kose of Blanchard Valley Hospital are tasked with trying to increase the number of doctors and pharmacists who use Ohio's Automated Rx Reporting System. They will also be educating health care professionals about opiate abuse.

The reporting system tracks information about prescription drugs, including patient information, who prescribed the medication, what drug was dispensed, the quantity prescribed and number of refills.

This data is used by police to investigate prescription drug abuse cases, Stanovich said.

"We have a lot of individuals out there who are doctor shopping," he said. "It's difficult (to track) without one centralized database."

"Doctor shopping" is when a person goes to different doctors and pharmacies, sometimes simultaneously, to get prescription drugs.

Members of the education focus area, led by Kathy Crates of Findlay Schools and Tim Kruse of the Hancock County Educational Service Center, will develop materials for schools on opiate abuse and addiction.

They will also come up with strategies for preventing opiate abuse among students and will educate staff on signs and symptoms of abuse, as well as addiction and treatment options.

Randy Greeno, superintendent of Findlay's Water Pollution Control Center, and Joe Rader, president of Rader Environmental Services, will lead efforts to advance the medication collection program.

Encouraging safe storage of unused medications between collection times, and working to increase the amount of medication collected are among this focus area's tasks.

There have been three medication collections in Hancock County the past two years. More than 189,000 medicine tablets and capsules were collected.

The task force will hold a public meeting from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Aug. 10 at University of Findlay Davis Room 102. An overview of the opiate problem will be given, followed by a description of the task force.

For more information call 419-424-1985, or e-mail [aaltman@bhg.org](mailto:aaltman@bhg.org).

(Editor's note: This version corrects the room number for the Aug. 10 meeting.)

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