

Opioid task force at work

Jul 30, 2018

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Opioid Task Force are connecting with pharmacies on becoming points of navigation or services for the opioid epidemic that has hit Sullivan County, from the left Samir “Sam” Shah, K and K Pharmacy Liberty, Maria Neumann, Pharmacist Jefferson Pharmacy and Martin Colavito, Director of Prevention Services for Catholic Charities

SULLIVAN — “We have to be able to look outside of ourselves to fight the stigma that lives within ourselves on substance abuse,” said Martin Colavito, director of Preventions Services for Catholic Charities and co-chair of the SALT Board of Directors.

Colavito is part of the Sullivan County Opioid Task Force along with pharmacist Samir “Sam” Shah of K and K Pharmacy in Liberty.

This dynamic duo have been traveling across the county to spread the word that pharmacies can distribute Narcan to patients without the need for a prescription from a doctor.

Equally important, Colavito and Shah are providing information flyers to the pharmacies they visit. They hope to encourage them to display the flyers so individuals who might need help can see it and use the information.

“We are trying to implement compassionate navigation to services,” said Colavito.

“We are trying to identify pharmacies as points of information, support, and navigation in our communities.”

On any given day, Colavito and Shah can be seen traversing the county, going from place to place and encouraging pharmacies to be that point of navigation in their communities for those in need of treatment from substance abuse.

“The pharmacies are our friends, our neighbors, they know people that come into their stores,” said Colavito.

“The only way we can look past the stigma is by taking a leap and realizing we might not have all the answers but we have the opportunity,” added Colavito.

By going to local pharmacies, Colavito and Shah are engaging the pharmacist face-to-face to hang signs and phone numbers so people can get the help they so desperately need.

“We decided to get together, to figure out what we can do,” said Shah. New York State is one of the 46 states that now allow a person to get Narcan without a prescription from a doctor. “Any pharmacy who is part of the program can give Narcan for free to most people. There is such a need in the county.”

Through the State Targeted Response (STR) program, Catholic Charities of Orange and Sullivan is now a NYS Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) designated Center of Treatment Innovation.

One pharmacy that is considering going on a standing order for Narcan is Jefferson Pharmacy in Jeffersonville.

“I think it's awesome what they [Colavito and Shah] are doing, I think that people will now know

where to go,” said Jefferson Pharmacist Maria Neumann. “This is what this program does. It [addiction] is rough on families and communities.”

The K and K Pharmacy has a standing order for Narcan. According to Shah, they give out about two boxes a day. Each box contains two doses of Narcan that can be administered to someone that is overdosing. The Narcan prescription can be refilled every 15 days.

“When I talk to my staff, I ask them to have compassion and not to look down on them. We don't look at it like the old way,” said Shah. “People come to us and feel more comfortable talking to us.” When you enter the K and K Pharmacy, there is a paper framed on the wall that gives information on seeking help for addiction. The pharmacist can begin a dialogue with the person and ask questions like, “Do you know someone who might need help,” and this can start the conversation that can lead to saving someone's life by giving out a card with information on where to get help.

Shah suggests that everyone should have Narcan in their house because you never know when you or a loved one might need it.

Shah also suggests that anyone with a high dose of prescription opioids from a doctor should have Narcan on hand in case of an accidental overdose.

According to Sullivan County Coroner, Albee Bockman, there have been nine deaths from opioid-related issues in the past 60 days alone.

“It's not only about pharmacies having standing orders of Narcan, it's also about actively pushing it out,” said Shah. “What's the point of having it if they are not pushing it out?”

When visiting the pharmacies, Colavito talked about how opioid abuse should be treated as a disease.

“If this person had diabetes, people are compassionate about it and want to help,” said Colavito.

“When people hear that someone is an addict, people tend to turn away from it and don't want to deal with it. This disease is at a point that's critical and has to be stabilized. This is one way of doing it,” added Colavito.