

OSU Combats Opioid Abuse In Rural Oklahoma Towns

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PAWNEE COUNTY, Oklahoma - The opioid epidemic is sweeping across Oklahoma, hitting rural counties especially hard.

According to Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, one Oklahoman dies every day from an opioid overdose.

Oklahoma State University is trying to combat this by giving people in smaller communities access to prescription drug disposal boxes.

Pawnee County is one of the top five counties in the state for the rate of opioid overdoses and OSU is hoping this drug drop box will help change those numbers.

"If you don't take them all or need them all then you need to get them out of the house so they don't fall into the wrong hands," said Palace Drug Pharmacist, Kyle Compton.

Kyle Compton has worked at Palace Drug for five years.

He says his favorite part about working in a small-town pharmacy is interacting with the people they serve.

"They've been coming here for years so see the same people and know them very well," said Compton.

Nearly 800 Oklahomans died from overdoses in 2017, and many of those happened in rural counties.

"A lot of people are seeing the opioid crisis, but they don't realize there is something they can actually do to help," said OSU Grant Coordinator & Prevention Specialist, Nicole Reed.

Oklahoma State University is partnering with pharmacies in rural counties to give people a place to get rid of unused prescriptions.

The drug take-back initiative is sponsored by OSU Prevention Programs.

They say they won a grant from the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services to make this initiative possible.

OSUPP partnered with Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) and Covanta to design and implement the program.

Many large pharmacies have them, but sometimes they are too far away.

"They've been putting drop boxes in all of their locations, but there's a lot of counties

across the state that don't have access to a Walgreens or a CVS," said Reed.

Palace Drug's new drug take-back receptacle is locked at all times and looks like a mailbox.

Then when it gets full, the pharmacy will ship it to a location where it can be disposed of safely.

Right now there are drop boxes at many local police departments in Oklahoma, but that's not usually a place people stop.

"You don't naturally stop at a police department, however, when we do make that trip into town to go see a doctor and then we stop by the pharmacy, that's just such a natural routine thing for people to do," said Reed.

"With the register here, people will see it and say I have medication I'm not using anymore, next time I'm in I'll bring it in," said Compton.

Because having local access could make a big difference in the local community.

"It's a place for them to come that don't have another place to go," said Compton.

This is the first drug drop box in Pawnee County but OSU hopes to add more soon. They do have another one in Creek County at the Med-World Pharmacy at 14 S Mission St., Sapulpa.