

# OSF St. Anthony's HealthCare holds discussion on opioid crisis

by Steven Spencer, Staff Writer  
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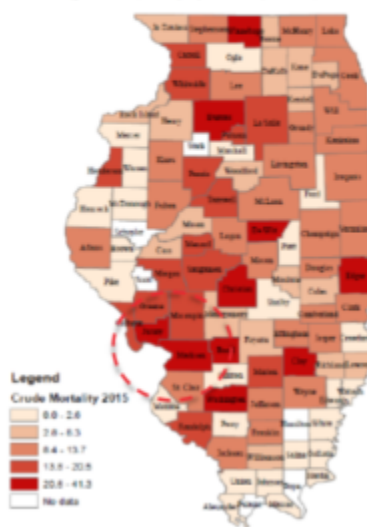


ALTON - OSF St. Anthony's HealthCare held another in its series of A Journey in Health Care Luncheons Wednesday afternoon discussing the opioid crisis and looking at prevalence, impact and pathways forward.

## Madison County Drug Overdose Deaths

- 2009: 35 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2010: 60 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2011: 52 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2012: 62 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2013: 53 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2014: 92 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2015: 75 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2016: 71 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2017: 85 total drug overdose deaths.
- 2018: 16 total (as of 3/12/18...)

Opioid Overdose Related Crude Mortality Rate  
(per 100,000 population) 2015, Illinois



Speakers included Ajay Pathak, President and CEO of OSF HealthCare St. Anthony's, Dr. Dennis Sands, Chief Medical Officer, Susanne Ringhausen, Manager of Psychological Services and Employee Assistance and Matthew Cary, Lead Nurse Practitioner Schumacher Group Emergency Services.

“Our current trajectory shows by 2020 opioids will be the leading cause of death of those under age 50,” Pathak said. “That is unacceptable. We owe our residents better than that. We have to figure out how to tackle this issue head on. Sometimes, those addicted to opioids are not bad people, but for a whole variety of reasons, they end up in an addictive situation. We have to figure out how do we support them through treatment. Opioid addiction is an equal opportunity killer. It doesn't discriminate by age, gender or any demographic. We have to come together as a community to combat this.”

Pathak said from what he could tell business and community leaders were able to get quite a lot out of the presentation at Saint Anthony's this week.

Since 1999 the number of opioids prescribed for pain has quadrupled in the United States and in 2016 more than 64,000 people died due to drug overdoses. Last year there were 85 deaths reported in Madison County with 30 caused by fentanyl alone and as of March 12th, 2018, there have already 16 reported overdoses.

Dr. Sands said it's an issue that affects everyone in the community.

"It raises crime rates, it raises costs, increases thefts," Sands said. "There's no way to arrest our way out of the problem. Patients on long-term use have been shown to increase the overall cost of healthcare. There's more of those folks on disability, those patients end up having more surgeries and increase the cost of healthcare for employers."

The discussion presented ways to combat the problem such as treatment, supporting legislation for insurance companies to cover treatment cost, quicker access to treatment, enforcement, investigating overdoses as homicides and education.

"Currently the state of Illinois does have an Opioid Action Plan," Sands said. "Which centers on prevention, treatment and response. One of the components of that plan is the increase in Prescription Monitoring Programs. We have that here at OSF and are currently using it. Our doctors can go right to the prescription monitoring program which lets you look at the patients you have before you to determine if this person somebody who might have an opioid problem or addiction."

Sands said that there are some rays of hope such as Senate Bill 772 which requires prescribers to register with the monitoring program, medication-assisted treatment, Partnership for Drug-Free Communities, Chestnut Health and the availability of Narcan nasal spray at Walgreens and CVS.

Susanne Ringhausen discussed the challenges that employers face due to the epidemic.

"Drug use and addiction has always been apart of American society, it's not something new," Ringhausen said. "The vast majority of people abusing illicit drugs are employed. That statistic has remained steady for many many years, so it does enter the workplace."



Ringhausen said 70 percent of the estimated 14.8 million Americans using illegal drugs are employed. In order to prohibit drug use in the workforce the Federal Drug-Free Workplace Act was put in place in 1988 and in 1992 the Illinois Drug-Free Workplace Act was put in place.

“In 1991 the Department of Transportation, mandated drug screening. That’s when employment drug screening came along,” Ringhausen said. “A lot of good activity happened from employers following that. A lot of education, a lot of intervention, a lot of things took place.”

The workplace concerns include safety for employees and the public, work performance, productivity, and absenteeism to name a few.

“Since 2011 the positivity rates for heroin in workplace drug screens was up 146 percent, that’s a shocking statistic,” Ringhausen said.

Ringhausen said most employers want their employees healthy and back in the workplace. She said education, detox, medicated assisted recovery and addiction treatments are all necessary and need to be supported.

“That word epidemic. Its growth is shocking, it’s deadly, but treatment and prevention do work,” Ringhausen added.

Matthew Cary spoke on the subject of provider challenges in administering medications for pain management.

“How do we manage patients pain,” Cary asked. “Obviously we want to treat their acute pain but we don’t want to compromise the long-term health of the patient. We know that 80 percent of individuals that abuse heroin began by diverting prescription pain medication. Most of what we use to gauge a patients comfort is subjective in nature. In other words, it is what the patient tells us it is. There are objective signs of pain such as a physical deformity after a traumatic injury or an increased heart rate in response to painful stimuli. However one of the standardized measurement is having the patient rate the pain on a scale of one to ten, therein lies subjectivity.”

Cary said there is also a challenge for providers to satisfy their patients and meeting their expectations as a provider.

“As healthcare providers, we have a duty to protect the well fair of our patients,” he said. “What we know about addiction is that an individual must have a desire to stop a problematic behavior in order to successful.”

During the question and answer session following the presentation, the subject of moving forward came up.

During the Q and A, Alton Chief of Police Jason Simmons said the topic of drug awareness to be presented to the community on a larger scale.

“Something I think people should touch base on is drug awareness,” Chief Simmons said. “I would venture a guess, looking around this room, that there are a lot of people in this room that don’t know what a button of heroin looks like. I think the first part as community stakeholders is to organize a drug awareness seminar or program for nurses, teachers, parents and others in the community, there are a lot that don’t have an idea what this stuff really even looks like.”