

County gets federal grant to reduce drug addiction

\$393,575 gives health officials money for reducing prescription drug and opiate abuses

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Jackson County has received a federal grant designed to attack prescription drug addiction from several angles and reduce opiate abuse in the Rogue Valley.

The grant of \$393,575 will be used to help physicians more easily access information from the state's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program; develop protocols for the use of naxolone, or Narcan, which stops opiate-based drug overdoses; and pay for public education related to the dangers of overprescribing narcotics. The grant also will pay for crisis intervention training for law enforcement and seeks to redirect some aspects of corrections from punitive to an emphasis on treatment.

Health officials have said an average of 20 million painkillers are prescribed each year in Jackson County, and that patients who seek help with addiction often must wait for weeks to months to receive treatment.

The grant comes from the Bureau of Justice's Harold Rogers Prescription Drug Monitoring Program and is for Oct. 1 through March 31, 2015.

Dr. Jim Shames, medical director for Jackson County Health and Human Services, has said the key to reducing addiction rates is to educate both prescribers and patients on the risks associated with prescribing drugs such as Oxycontin, especially for chronic pain. He and other health officials say that while opiates are effective for short-term, acute pain, there's insufficient evidence to support their use for chronic, noncancer pain.

For the past two years, Shames has been working with more than 70 local health care providers to educate doctors and others on the dangers of overprescribing painkillers. They formed the Opiate Prescribers Group, which in May unveiled new guidelines for prescribing painkillers and recognizing the danger signs of addiction.

Oregon in 2010-11 had the highest rate of prescription-drug abuse in the country at 6.4 percent, compared with 4.6 percent nationwide, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Community Justice officials said prescription drug abuse has skyrocketed locally. Officials said those who became addicted to painkillers often make the transition to the less expensive heroin when their supply runs dry.

"We've seen a huge increase in that over the last few years where prescription drugs have become more and more of a problem," said Community Justice Director Shane Hagey. "It's going to take a partnership with all the agencies. Everybody's got to attack the problem altogether. We've got to look at it as a community problem."

The Jackson County project funded by the federal grant will be called the Data Drive Medico-Justice Practice Improvement Project. Helping implement the project will be representatives from Health and Human Services, the District Attorney's Office, Community Justice, Circuit Court, the Opioid Prescribers Group and the Jefferson Regional Health Alliance.

The Board of Commissioners on Wednesday approved acceptance of the grant.

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