

TITLE: Engaging Communities to Enact Change: Evaluation of Interdisciplinary Efforts to Reduce Opioid Abuse in Rural Oregon

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STUDENT SUBMISSION: Yes

TOPIC/TARGET AUDIENCE: Rural Opioid Abuse Mitigation - Aimed at researchers interested in opioid study, Rural public health officials, student researchers

ABSTRACT: The United States' opioid epidemic has established itself as one of the most severe public health crises in history. As a result, over 40,000 individuals died in 2016 from prescription opioid and heroin overdoses resulting in the declaration of a Public Health emergency by leaders. The urgency of this situation warrants creative and novel interventions focused on harm reduction. The problem is multifaceted, requiring efforts from various outlets including law enforcement, local government officials, healthcare providers, and public health systems. Further, due to the complexity of this epidemic, interdisciplinary collaborations between key stakeholders are likely to be the most successful in saving the lives of those affected by this situation. Of note, the spread of the epidemic is unequally distributed with far higher rates of illicit and prescription opioid use in rural counties statewide. Thus, targeted efforts focused on rural regions with the greatest needs are of particular concern. To accomplish this, a collaborative effort in rural Oregon was enacted to provide an opportunity for these stakeholders to become further educated and subsequently address the problem. The following four key initiatives were developed to guide efforts: reduce the number of pills prescribed, educate patients and the public, allow for better disposal of disused drugs, and expand access to treatment services. In total, 228 individuals attended the conference with the majority of attendees representing the healthcare industry. Extensive evaluation was conducted to examine the summit's effectiveness in accomplishing its four aims. Qualitative data were collected via phone interviews with individuals selected through a nomination process (n=7). Other data sources include pre (response rate 45%) and post (response rate 24%) summit surveys. Key findings indicated that the summit was able to increase awareness of the opioid problem in the region resulting in a large, positive impact on provider opioid prescribing practices, increased acceptance of alternative therapies for pain management, and increased collaborative community efforts. Further, the summit catalyzed the formation of multi-sectorial work groups formed to tackle issues focused on increasing drug disposal programs and medication assisted therapy. Public education efforts were enhanced as a result as well. More specifically, 61% (n=37) of respondents reported that drug take back programs had become more available and 62% (n=38) observed an increase in medication assisted therapy availability. Other findings include substantial increases in PDMP usage, Naloxone availability, and non-opioid therapy utilization. Additional responses highlighted existing barriers in accessing treatment, alternative pain management options, and PDMP software. These results highlight the potential effectiveness of interdisciplinary collaborative efforts between key stakeholders in the development of solutions to complex problems such as the opioid epidemic in rural areas. It is evident that substantial progress has been made in opioid reduction efforts as a result of this programming.

OBJECTIVE(S): Describe the effectiveness of current efforts to reduce opioid abuse in rural areas
Discuss the current state of opioid abuse in rural Oregon