



New York State Senate Public Hearing

**New York State Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids,
Addiction & Overdose Prevention**

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Good Morning Chairpersons Rivera, Carlucci and Harckham, and Members of the Joint Senate Task Force on Opioids, Addiction & Overdose Prevention. I am Dr. Charles Barron, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for New York City Health + Hospitals (“Health + Hospitals”). I am joined by Dr. Rebecca Linn-Walton, Assistant Vice President, Office of Behavioral Health. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on strategies for reducing overdoses, improving individual and community health, and addressing the harmful consequences of drug use.

Health + Hospitals is an essential partner in the City’s fight against opioid use disorder (OUD). Harmful substance use is a significant public health problem in NYC, and system-wide. We treat 90,000 unique patients with substance use disorder (SUD) annually; approximately 20,000 (22%) of those patients have an OUD. Health + Hospitals provides an extensive array of SUD services, including detoxification, outpatient counseling programs, medication assisted treatment, methadone treatment programs, and specialized services. Health + Hospitals is also a leader in implementing new strategies to identify and treat SUD in innovative ways, including in the emergency departments, inpatient units, primary care, and soon through ancillary or outpatient detoxification services. Health + Hospitals facilities in the Bronx are leading these efforts.

Health + Hospitals’ role in the City’s HealingNYC Initiative

As the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) testified, to address the opioid epidemic, the de Blasio Administration is undertaking a number of new and expanded initiatives that focus on both the geographic areas and populations most severely affected. HealingNYC is the City’s comprehensive

strategy to reverse the course of the opioid epidemic by focusing efforts on four goals:

1. **Prevent opioid overdose deaths by distributing naloxone** – a lifesaving drug that can reverse opioid overdose – to communities and social networks where risk of drug overdose is highest;
2. **Prevent opioid misuse and addiction by investing in prevention and education**, as well as by providing counseling and linkages to care for individuals who use opioids or who recently experienced an overdose;
3. **Protect New Yorkers with effective drug treatment by making investments into our health care system** in order to increase capacity to provide medications for addiction treatment, which are the most effective form of opioid use disorder treatments; and
4. **Protect New Yorkers by reducing the supply of dangerous opioids.**

Health + Hospitals is a key partner in HealingNYC through the following initiatives:

- All 11 acute care hospitals and Gotham’s federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) are certified as Hospital-Based Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs (OOPP);
- Consult for Addiction Treatment and Care in Hospitals (CATCH) teams to connect hospitalized patients to SUD treatment;
- Buprenorphine Expansion in Primary Care;
- Judicious Prescribing Training and Guidance for opioid prescribing; and
- Emergency Department’s (ED) comprehensive response to SUD, with social workers and peers.

Health + Hospitals SUD-related programs

All Health + Hospitals acute care facilities and Gotham's FQHC sites are State-certified Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs (OOPPs) that routinely dispense naloxone based on best practices, including overdose prevention training of patients and community members. Health + Hospitals strategy has been to provide OUD treatment throughout the system of care, from the emergency department to outpatient services, and most recently in our primary care offices. Delivering treatment to patients wherever they access the health system is key to reducing unintentional overdoses, helping patients identify the care they need, and providing care in the location in which they are most comfortable seeking services. This approach has meant that for our patients, there is no "wrong door."

Since the launch of HealingNYC in 2017, Health + Hospitals has dispensed over 9,000 naloxone kits to patients and community members. Health + Hospitals has held community facing SUD education events that includes Naloxone distribution at our public hospitals. These training events prepare community members and non-clinical hospital staff to recognize an opioid overdose and properly and safely administer naloxone medication to reverse it. Naloxone kits are distributed free to all participants to empower friends, family and other community members to serve as first responders during a potential overdose. The education sessions are open to all in the community and feature information about what Health + Hospitals is doing to combat the opioid epidemic, what treatment is available in the community for opioid use disorder, and what New Yorkers can do to prevent opioid overdose. Everyone who receives a kit also receives a short training that includes how to identify someone who is suffering from an overdose and how to properly administer the naloxone nasal spray.

Consult for Addiction Treatment and Care in Hospitals (CATCH)

Health + Hospitals' naloxone dispensing trainings builds on existing efforts within the public hospital system to help combat opioid misuse and related deaths. To maximize patient connection to substance use services, Health + Hospitals launched an addiction consult service at six hospitals (NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue, Metropolitan, Coney Island, Lincoln, Elmhurst, and Woodhull) to engage patients hospitalized on medicine or surgical floors who have been diagnosed with or are at risk for SUD, regardless of the reason for their hospital stay. The team engages patients who may be more receptive to treatment because of their current health issues. CATCH teams are comprised of prescribers, social workers, and peers who provide assessment, brief engagement, bridging medication, and post-discharge follow-up calls for all CATCH patients. Health + Hospitals has partnered with New York University to formally evaluate the programs via a National Institute on Drug Abuse grant. The CATCH teams have completed over 1,600 consults.

Buprenorphine Expansion in Primary Care

In order to treat as many possible patients with OUD across our system, Health + Hospitals is expanding Medication for Addiction Treatment (MAT) in primary care clinics. Since the start of HealingNYC in 2017, Health + Hospitals has exceeded the program's target and now has over 450 providers who are certified to prescribe buprenorphine across our system. Integrating primary care with behavioral health, and substance use treatment will increase access to treatment and enable primary care providers to better serve this patient population.

At each of our hospitals and Gotham sites, our primary care clinics offer office-based opioid treatment (OBOT). Opioid treatment at each clinic is led by a clinician who has undergone special training and licensing to authorize the prescription of

buprenorphine. The training required of clinicians to prescribe buprenorphine is ongoing and provided by DOHMH. The training is often called “x-waiver training” because upon completion, clinicians have an “x” added to their unique Drug Enforcement Agency identification number that indicates they are qualified to prescribe buprenorphine. Dozens more clinicians have completed the training and are awaiting final federal approval to proceed. All doctors who want to prescribe buprenorphine must undergo four (4) hours of on-line work and four (4) hours of in-person training, followed by the licensing process, which typically takes four to six weeks. Training is also available for nurse practitioners and physician assistants. As we work to lower barriers to accessing medication it would be helpful if the current federal requirements to obtain a waiver to prescribe buprenorphine under the Drug Addiction Treatment Act (DATA 2000) was lifted as this federal requirement limits the medical community’s capacity to respond to the needs of opioid-dependent individuals. Health + Hospitals provides ongoing peer supervision for new providers so that “system champions” can share their expertise and spread best practices across the system.

Training

At Health + Hospitals, all providers who want to prescribe buprenorphine have access to resources including: learning more about integrating behavioral health into primary care practice; building caseloads for patients with OUD; and collaborative work with other practitioners. This 16-week, enhanced training course is part of the international Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) model. Through, a video-conferencing learning collaborative, Project ECHO extends specialty education and support to primary care providers on targeted diseases or health conditions, expanding the scope of services available to patients

in primary care and reducing barriers to care and treatment. This training is open to Health + Hospitals practitioners in all five boroughs.

Throughout 2019, Health + Hospitals is conducting public trainings at each of the 11 acute care facilities. Through these trainings we have provided information to patients, family members, and community members on how to identify the symptoms of SUD -- OUD in particular -- how to provide life-saving emergency medication (naloxone), and where to seek help for themselves or a loved one. These trainings are open to the public, including community members, religious organizations, and local nonprofits and other community partners. Our next two public trainings will take place in September at both Lincoln Hospital here in the Bronx and Elmhurst Hospital in Queens.

Opioid Treatment Programs

The availability of buprenorphine through primary care in adult medicine clinics is just the latest addition to the way to connect Health + Hospitals patients with SUD and life-saving treatment through emergency department, inpatient, and outpatient specialty care. Four (4) Opioid Treatment Programs have specialized focus on providing medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder, most often methadone or buprenorphine. The clinics at NYC Health + Hospitals/Bellevue, Elmhurst, Kings County, and Metropolitan provide care collectively to 700 patients on average every month. Also, many patients with OUD receive care through one of 11 programs around the City that treat a broad range of SUD. In addition to providing medication-assisted treatment, these programs offer support groups and individual counseling, as well as innovative care options such as acupuncture and vocational counseling and referrals to work opportunities. Additionally, NYC Health + Hospitals/Correctional Health Services operates the nation's first and largest jail-based MAT program, treating patients in custody, connecting them to ongoing care

upon discharge, and equipping families and friends with naloxone to address the heightened risk of overdose in the weeks immediately following re-entry into the community.

Judicious Prescribing Training and Guidance

To ensure that all possible prevention strategies are implemented, a total of 2,220 providers across Health + Hospitals received education and training in judicious opioid prescribing in FY2017. Judicious prescribing means prescribing smaller doses of opioid analgesics for shorter durations, and avoiding co-prescriptions with benzodiazepines, which can increase a patient's risk of overdose. Additionally, prescribers receive reminders through Health + Hospitals' electronic health record system to ensure fidelity to these prescribing guidelines. Further, NYC Health + Hospitals/ Coney Island, Harlem and Woodhull have conducted grand rounds on substance use disorder stigma.

Emergency Department Peer Advocates Addressing Substance Use

Because many patients with SUD seek care at some point—for various reasons—through the emergency department, Health + Hospitals is implementing a number of interventions. Health + Hospitals created Addiction Teams and a comprehensive substance use disorder response in all 11 EDs. Standardized nurse screening for SUD also assists team members in identifying patients for the teams of Peers and Counseling staff to provide assessment, intervention, naloxone distribution, and navigation to treatment post-discharge.

Patients are screened for substance use in triage or the nursing assessment. The screening helps to rapidly identify patients in need of intervention by one of the new Emergency Department Addiction Teams Peer advocates and licensed social workers or counselors will connect with Emergency Department patients, including

those with non-fatal opioid overdose, opioid intoxication, or a history of harmful opioid use, and link them to ongoing treatment. Peer advocates, who have lived experience with substance use disorder treatment, will use their personal stories and insights to connect with vulnerable patients at a time when they may be receptive to help, in an effort to link patients to care and resources.

Conclusion

As the City and the State work to address the opioid crisis, Health + Hospitals will continue to ensure substance use treatment is available to any patient who needs it, anywhere that patient enters the Health + Hospitals system of care. Health + Hospitals provides key services in the Bronx at the heart of the opioid epidemic. We have and continue to work hand in hand with community partners to provide care to those most in need, and to provide healing support for patients and their families. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today, and we look forward to answering your questions.

