

Controlled Substance Care Team

CHI St. Gabriel's Health – Little Falls, MN

Overview

CHI St. Gabriel's Health is a multi-facility health care entity that includes 25-bed St. Gabriel's Hospital, Family Medical Center (a multispecialty clinic), Little Falls Orthopedics (an orthopedic and podiatry practice) and Alverna Apartments (a 60-unit, HUD-subsidized senior housing complex), all located in Little Falls.

In a county of just over 30,000 residents, one of the community's four pharmacies alone filled an average of 40,000 narcotic pill prescriptions every single month. Staff members at CHI St. Gabriel's Health knew they had to do something.

"We see an overdose death every three months in our county," said Kurt Devine, M.D., a physician at CHI St. Gabriel's. "That's devastating, and the reality is that it's preventable."

In response, the hospital brought together physicians, a social worker, pharmacist and a dedicated nurse to form the Controlled Substance Care Team, a group whose sole task is preventing and treating opioid misuse. To do it, the group monitors patients prescribed narcotic medication to treat chronic pain.

Devine said, "Our goal is to do what we can do to help patients with their pain but decrease the narcotics coming out of our clinic." If the team determines a patient may be misusing his or her medication, the group connects the patient with resources to treat his or her substance use disorder.

The care team works closely with law enforcement partners, but their goal may be surprising: keeping people out of jail. Deputy Jason McDonald, a narcotics investigator in Morrison County, partners with the hospital to help people experiencing opioid addiction. "I can arrest people over, and over, and over again, but they don't need jail," he said. "We need to get these people into treatment."

Impact

The entire community is seeing results. When the program started, pain was the number one reason patients visited the emergency department. Today, it's not even in the top 20.

"When we prescribe fewer narcotics, we see fewer people in treatment, fewer people in our jails and fewer overdose deaths," said Devine.

CHI St. Gabriel's Health President Lee Boyles credits the community's collaboration for the program's success. "We all own a little bit of this problem, and we knew we couldn't solve it alone," he said.

Lessons Learned

As communities across the country search for remedies to the opioid crisis, this community in Greater Minnesota has a model that's working. Its success has been so notable that the team was invited by Congressman Rick Nolan to provide a congressional briefing in Washington, D.C. The team expected just a few people to attend, but the briefing room was full of congressional staff representing communities across the country.

Nolan said it was the team's solution to the opioid issue that attracted so much attention. "Finally someone wasn't just saying, 'Hey, we've got a really serious problem here!'" he said. "They had a model that worked."

Future Goals

The hospital's team is funded by a Minnesota state grant through April 2017. As the hospital looks for new funding, it also wants to share its success with other communities.

"We are currently working with our state legislators for funding to teach our care model and expand into neighboring communities," said Kathy Lange, CHI St. Gabriel's foundation director.

This project is part of a \$45 million State Innovation Model (SIM) cooperative agreement awarded to the Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services in 2013 by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) to help implement the Minnesota Accountable Health Model.

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