



December 13, 2016

West Side Heroin Task Force Town Hall Meeting

The West Side Heroin Task Force met at Loretto Hospital at the end of October 2016 to give participants a chance to hear from each other to fulfill the mission of the Task Force, which is “To provide evidenced based, health centered solutions for those experiencing heroin and opioid use disorders while connecting families, service providers and communities together to promote health and well-being for West Side residents.”

We had a great turnout, and participants included those presently in recovery and family members affected by recovery; Congressman Danny K. Davis; Dr. Nirav Shah, Director of Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH); Dr. Sonia Mehta, CEO/CMO- Loretto Hospital; Marianne Schiavone, Chair of Board of Trustees- West Suburban Medical Center; Gabriela Zapata-Alma, Director of Substance Use Treatment Programs-Thresholds; Chicago Department of Public Health; Chicago Park District; Chicago Police Department; Illinois State Patrol; Illinois Pharmacists Association; inpatient detox doctors/staff and outpatient substance abuse counselors; methadone clinic staff; mental health/substance abuse treatment providers, including Medication Assisted Treatment; local hospitals; organizations involved with community awareness/mobilization/communication; local businesses; clergy and spiritual ministry; services for those who are homeless; and those involved with criminal justice and substance use disorder treatment advocacy.

We noted that the language we use is important, and that addiction to street drugs is a brain condition that needs treatment. We need to use the language that those who are affected are not addicts or dope fiends or substance abusers, but persons and family members with an opioid use disorder which can be successfully treated.

The meeting was rich with ideas and was a strong coming together of many stakeholders proposing to strengthen the partnerships and to do all we can to help people living with the illness of using heroin on the West Side of Chicago. Here are some of those ideas:

- Strengthen links between community doctors who prescribe Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) like Suboxone AND those in the recovering community, including 12 step groups, agencies helping with recovery, and churches focused on recovery
- Strengthen links between community doctors who prescribe Suboxone AND hospital-based treatment and residential programs, so community doctors can more easily refer patients when they need a higher level of care, and hospitals can secure quality and seamless outpatient follow-up after discharge
- Strengthen links between Cook County Jail AND community doctors who prescribe Suboxone to prevent recidivism and improve care
- Strengthen links with law enforcement departments AND mental health care (Thresholds example at Central and Lake)
- Improving access to and awareness of quality pain clinics for community providers to improve pain treatment using modalities other than narcotic medications
- Strengthen links to doctors prescribing Suboxone AND community mental health professionals
- Improve co-treatment of substance use disorders/mental health/pain problems
 - There is a high prevalence of PTSD in those with opioid use disorder

- Pay attention to social determinants of health, e.g. poverty, stress from income inequality, social safety net, housing, employment, social supports, especially on re-entry
- Work regionally with suburban leadership and law enforcement

Dr. Nirav Shah, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health, noted that those most vulnerable to death from overdose are those recently released from confinement such as prison or jail. His department is working on access to Medicaid immediately on release from confinement and is considering the use of Vivitrol (long-acting injection of naltrexone) on release from confinement for certain persons; improving access to naloxone for treatment of overdose; improving the access to naloxone inhalers vs. injectors – to all doctors’ offices; learning more about Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution (OEND) ; encouraging doctors and other providers to pay attention to potentially deadly drug-drug interactions with buprenorphine (Suboxone), especially with benzodiazepines like Xanax; decreasing barriers to Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT); encouraging all Illinois doctors to prescribe MAT and to support those in recovery; improving Illinois’ Prescription Monitoring Program (PMP) so it is up to date in real time; enforcing the Heroin Crisis Act provision that prohibits Medicaid programs from requiring prior authorization before Suboxone is dispensed, and work to make that principle apply for other insurance plans; increasing the manpower for treatment; and advocating so Medicaid will pay for services by Recovery Specialists.

The city of Chicago has allocated money for awareness and education campaigns for prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder and to increase access to naloxone to treat overdoses– we need to advocate that the West Side is included in plans for this money so it is well-spent where the need is the greatest.

The West Side Heroin Task Force has great momentum coming from our Town Hall Meeting, and I look forward to seeing all the Task Force can do to improve the lives of all by improving the prevention and treatment of opioid use disorder and successfully treating opiate overdoses when they occur.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District