



Concerning Our Health

Greetings from the Putnam County Department of Health

The 2012/13 flu season is one of the busiest in recent memory, in terms of vaccination statistics. All hands were on deck as we pulled together to organize two additional influenza clinics in January to meet demand from residents. As we move into spring, the height of the flu season is behind us, but new research (see page 3) indicates future seasons may prove similarly demanding.

I also want to call your attention to a serious and significant concern facing our society and physicians in particular—opioid drug abuse. Unfortunately as the problem grows nationwide, so it does in Putnam County as well. Your involvement and commitment to solving this complex, challenging issue is fundamental to our success.

—Allen Beals, MD, JD, Commissioner of Health



Rx: Limit prescription medications to reduce overdose rates

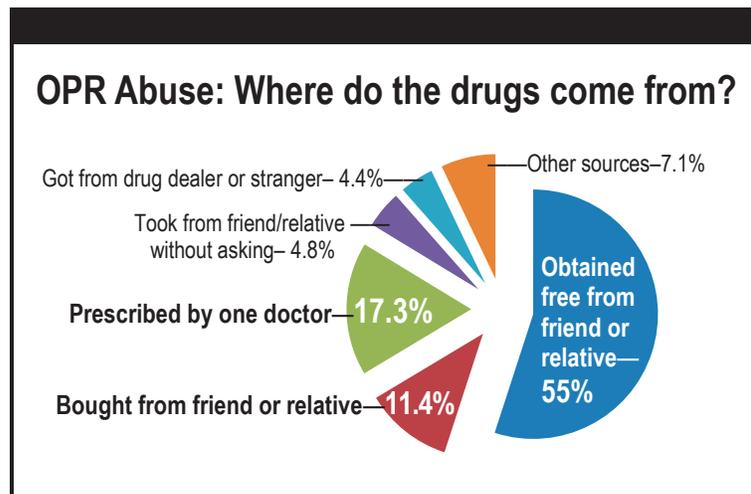
American medicine chests are fully stocked—enough prescription painkillers were prescribed in 2010 to medicate every American adult around-the-clock for one month. So describes the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in their *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* for November 4, 2011. Sales of prescribed opioid pain relievers (OPR) quadrupled nationwide between 1999 and 2010, and the report further concludes that prescribing rates, not demographic differences, account for the state-by-state variation in OPR abuse. All areas are affected; each and every death is significant, and essentially preventable.

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Suspected heroin abuse was the cause, but these types of cases are known to sometimes involve individuals for whom prescribed pain medication served as a gateway drug to addiction. With these deaths, the number of opioid overdose fatalities, among individuals 18 to 34 years, topped more than 12 in the last year in Putnam and Northern Westchester, according to local media.

These statistics mirror the national drug overdose trend which has more than tripled since 1990. Prescription painkillers have played a staggering role in this rise, and according to the CDC, American overdose deaths from OPR now exceed those involving heroin and cocaine combined. Additionally, the number of all drug overdoses in the



Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: volume 1: summary of national findings. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Office of Applied Studies; 2011. Available from URL: <http://oas.samhsa.gov/NSDUH/2k10NSDUH/2k10Results.htm#2.16> or <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecreational/safety/rxbrief/>

Continued on page 2.

What physicians can do...

While New York State Law allows dispensing Schedule II controlled substances, such as Oxycontin and Percocet, for up to a 30-day supply or longer in specific instances, doctors should consider the following reductions and substitutions:

1. For acute pain, consider analgesic pain relievers first. If OPR is required, use only short-acting agents. A three-day supply should be sufficient. **Avoid prescribing more than a seven-day supply.**
2. For chronic non-cancer pain, OPR should not be considered first-line medication.
3. Walk-in clinics, dental clinics, emergency departments and other episodic care providers should not prescribe long-acting opioids.
4. When opioids are prescribed, patients require follow-up and evaluation.
5. Patients should be advised to keep OPR in a safe, locked cabinet at all times. Unused medications should be disposed through a collection program, not flushed down the toilet. (See story on Putnam's Medication Take-Back Day Program on page 2.)

Source: Preventing Misuse of Prescription Opioid Drugs, available at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/chi/chi30-4.pdf>

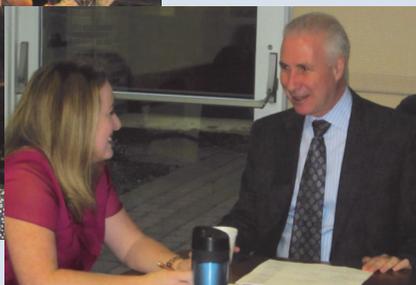
Dr. Beals speaks with obstetricians about Health Department's services for new moms

Allen Beals, MD, Health Commissioner for Putnam County, and Rebecca Wittenberg, RN, maternal child health (MCH) nurse supervisor, visited Putnam Hospital Center in January to help enhance referrals to the health department's MCH nurses to better serve the needs of the County.

Patient eligibility is broad. It includes not only clinical indications

such as prematurity or low birth weight, but also social or environmental circumstances, such as young or inexperienced parents who need assistance. This may simply include breastfeeding support for the mother.

Two full-time health department public health nurses, both Masters-prepared, make home visits to new moms; a third part-time staffer is a bicultural/bilingual Spanish-speaking nurse. Each one has expertise in comprehensive post-partum care, breastfeeding support, neonates, pediatrics and special need populations. Referring physicians are always kept informed of their patients' progress.



Katie Burgess, MD, left, chair of PHC's Department of obstetrics/gynecology, speaks with Dr. Beals, who previously practiced obstetrics/gynecology in Westchester.

For referrals to maternal child health nurses:

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Diane Liscia, RN, MS, CLC
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In memoriam: John Rosen, MD, pediatrician and child advocate

With the death of pediatrician John Rosen, MD, in December 2012, the Putnam County Department of Health and lead poisoning prevention advocates across the country lost an admired colleague and true medical activist.

Dr. Rosen was a leader in the fight against childhood lead poisoning. In 1969 he became professor of pediatrics at Montefiore Medical Center and the head of the Division of Environmental Sciences at The Children's Hospital there, which became home to the largest lead poisoning prevention program in the country. In 2008, a \$1 million grant from the New York State Department of Health refunded the full service Lead Poisoning Resource Center, which serves the New York City metropolitan area, Long Island and the Hudson Valley, including Putnam County. Among other stellar accomplishments, Dr. Rosen established Montefiore's Safe House which provides temporary shelter, along with education and support, to families of lead poisoned children, while lead hazards in their homes are remediated. He pioneered the use of x-ray fluorescence to measure bone lead levels and was instrumental in developing lead poisoning treatment centers in China.

Public health nurse Joanne Ryan, RN, who has worked in the health department's lead poison-

ing prevention program for more than ten years, consulted with Dr. Rosen on a number of difficult cases over the years. "Dr. Rosen was a true champion for children," Ms. Ryan recalled, "not only personally overseeing the clinical care and treatment for thousands of children, but also spearheading efforts for stricter policies and standards when it came to measuring blood lead levels."

As a national authority on the subject, Dr. Rosen led a committee for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1991 which reduced the acceptable blood lead level (BLL) from 60 to 10 microgram per deciliter of blood, where it remained until last year. Based on multiple studies showing irreversible adverse effects of even low-level lead poisoning, Dr. Rosen worked to reduce the standard even further. This year the CDC essentially halved the acceptable BLL to 5 micrograms, emphasizing to physicians and parents that even minute quantities of lead can be dangerous to the brains of developing children.

For information or lead screenings:

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Limiting OPR Abuse, *continued from front page*

U.S. in 2008 approached the number of deaths from motor vehicle crashes, the leading cause of injury death, and drug overdose deaths continues to climb.

Medication Take-Back Day Offers Free, Safe Drug Disposal

The next Medication Take-Back Day is planned for Saturday, April 27, at Putnam Hospital Center, Wagner Cancer Pavilion, 670 Stoneleigh Avenue in Carmel, from 9 am to 2 pm.

Flushing medicines down the toilet contaminates the ground water; leaving unused medicines around may invite misuse by young people, and/or family friends or acquaintances.

Organized by the Putnam County Communities That Care (CTC) Coalition, Putnam Hospital Center, the Sheriff's Department, and the Department of Health, these biannual events have collected thousands of pounds of unwanted medicine from hundreds of residents since the events began in 2010.

For further info:

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Hard-hitting flu season prompts extra clinics

It started early and delivered a wallop. This year's flu season was widespread, prompting Governor Cuomo to declare a statewide public health emergency on January 12. For Putnam County Department of Health staff who took it in stride, it meant adding additional vaccination clinics to keep up with high demand.

Nearly 1,000 Putnam County residents and workers were immunized in January alone at two extra clinics held in the Health Department offices at 1 Geneva Road in Brewster.

Other high-volume clinics included 573 people vaccinated at Brewster High School in three hours and 715 at two events at the Carmel Fire Department. Fourteen school-based clinics throughout the County also resulted in more than 1,300 children, teachers and administrators getting their shots, bringing the total tally of flu immunizations

administered by the Health Department to a grand total of 4,461.

What to expect in the future?

Researchers from the Mathematical, Computational and Modeling Sciences Center at Arizona State University studied nearly two decades of influenza and climate data and determined that warm winters, like 2011/2012 season last year, which typically result in less illness, are often followed by more severe flu seasons such as the current one. They further predict that if global warming continues and warm winters become more frequent, flu outbreaks the following year will likely be more severe.

Source: Towers S, Chowell G, Hameed R, Jastrebski M, Khan M, Meeks J, Mubayi A, Harris G. Climate change and influenza: the likelihood of early and severe influenza seasons following warmer than average winters. *PLoS Currents Influenza*. 2013 Jan 28.

Program spurs patients in self management of chronic disease

Enhancing patient engagement is the goal of the new chronic disease self-management program (CDSMP) being introduced in Putnam County by the Visiting Nurse Service of Hudson Valley, Putnam County's Office for the Aging, Putnam Hospital Center and the Department of Health.

Based on a research model developed at the Stanford University School of Medicine, the program involves a six-week session with weekly classes, each two-and-a-half hours in duration, led by a peer leader who has received special training. Participants learn and practice a number of self-management skills that can be applied to any chronic disease. These include communication skills; disease-related problem solving; cognitive symptom management techniques such as relaxation, reframing or distraction; exercise; emotional management of symptoms such as fear or self-doubt; and availability and use of community resources.

Chronic disease management places a large burden on physicians and the healthcare system. It accounts for 70 percent of healthcare expenditures and is the main reason patients visit doctors.

Unfortunately the present healthcare system is more adept at handling acute, rather than chronic illness, and as a result, treatment of chronic diseases often results in disconnected and fragmented care. Effective treatment involves not only the physician, but also the patient, who must become an active participant, appropriately and continuously utilizing a variety of healthcare practices. Changing behaviors to improve symptoms or slow disease progression, interpreting and reporting symptoms, and using medications properly, are a few of the challenges chronic disease sufferers face and the CDSMP assists participants to acquire these skills.

Ready, set, go! A course is set toward accreditation

The Putnam County Department of Health has taken up the challenge to become one of the first local health departments in New York State to become accredited. Although relatively new, the idea of public health accreditation was in many ways inevitable. Universities and hospitals are accredited, why not health departments?

In March 2011, it became official when the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, announced support for a national voluntary accreditation program for public health agencies through the new nonprofit Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). Thirty local, state and tribal health departments from around the country pre-tested the process prior to CDC endorsement. Tioga County, west of Binghamton, with a population of just over 50,000, was the sole New York county to participate in the pilot testing.

The arduous process, similar to accreditation by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals (JCAHO), can take anywhere from two to four years on an initial attempt. The

Putnam County Department of Health is completing its strategic plan and embarking on a Community Health Improvement Plan. This work, in addition to a Community Health Assessment, serves as the preliminary requirement for accreditation application.

The department must also document adherence to PHAB's "Standards & Measures" across twelve domains that range from community health surveillance and assessment, and community education and engagement, to enforcement, continuous quality improvement, and public health research. Additionally, the department must present plans for maintaining a competent workforce, as well as administrative and management capacity.

A site visit is one of the final hurdles the department will face after completing the necessary groundwork and documentation.

Public health accreditation will provide physicians and residents alike independent assurance that the Health Department is functioning at an optimal level and fulfilling its mission to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community.

For further info or referrals:

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Another Door Opens in Brewster

Access to healthcare has been identified as a public health priority in Putnam County for a number of years and health department staff have worked tirelessly with community members to bring a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to the area. County Executive **MaryEllen Odell** cut the ribbon and was joined by **Lindsay Farrell**, President/CEO, Open Door Family Medical Centers, to her right, as well as elected officials and County leaders to celebrate the grand opening of Open Door Brewster at 155 Main Street in Brewster.

Open Door is a FQHC that provides quality primary health care and human services at affordable prices to the community, particularly those who are under- or uninsured, and those lacking access to health care. It is a nationally recognized, patient-centered medical home and the first FQHC to open in Putnam County.

Jay A. Zaslów, MD, MPH, second from left, who had a private practice at the same address, and **Debra Gerson, MD**, third from left, previously an Ossining-based Open Door physician, are the primary care physicians on staff. For further information, please call 845-279-6999.

Folic acid benefit may be far reaching

Since the 1990s, the Institute of Medicine has recommended that all women of childbearing age take 400 µg of folic acid daily to prevent neural tube defects (NTD). A well-balanced diet should be complemented by folate-fortified foods, folic acid supplements, or both. This recommendation was based on a broad range of research including a number of randomized clinical trials (RCT). With mandatory fortification of flour in the U.S. and Canada, neural tube defect (NTD) rates have been reduced more than 30 percent.

Folic acid supplementation is recommended not only for those planning a pregnancy, but also for all women of childbearing age. Unplanned pregnancies may account for as much as 40 percent of all pregnancies. NTD incidence is approximately 1 in 1000 pregnancies.

Recent evidence also suggests that folic acid prevents other major defects as well, including heart anomalies.

These affect 1 in 110 newborns and account for a third or more of infant fatalities. One RCT showed a 47-percent reduction in birth defects other than NTD, including congenital heart abnormalities, with a multi-vitamin supplement taken periconceptionally.

Despite public health messages about the importance of folic acid supplements prior to and during pregnancy, their use is not widespread according to a 2006 report in *The Lancet* medical journal.

For further info: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspnsnrfol.htm