



# Concerning Our Health

## Greetings from the Putnam County Department of Health

In this issue we focus on one of Putnam County's health improvement priorities—improving mental health. The County's Suicide Prevention Task Force is hard at work and will be launching a "Means Matter" campaign with an event on March 26, highlighted below. An update on chronic disease prevention, another priority, is on page 4.

Meanwhile, on the heels of Ebola, public health is again in the media with the current measles outbreak, one of the largest in recent years. My thoughts on this topic are shared on page 3.

Two other stories rounding out the issue include recaps of two new programs—Teen Health Day and the Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, a New York State-approved program we recently launched in Putnam.

—Allen Beals, MD, JD, Commissioner of Health



## Health Department and Partners Take on Mental Health as Priority

**Mental, emotional and behavioral (MEB) disorders affect almost one in five young people at any one time nationwide.**

Nearly 75 percent of these disorders, including depression and substance abuse, are **diagnosed between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age**, and these can have lifelong effects with psychosocial and financial burdens for individuals and communities. New York State and Putnam County data mirror these national trends with increasing numbers of local residents reporting mental health issues.

This alarming outlook has prompted the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) to identify mental health promotion as one of five "action areas" for the state. Putnam County's Department of Health (PCDOH) and Department of Social Services, along with Putnam Hospital Center and a myriad of other community partners have also selected the advancement of MEB health as a top priority for the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) as well. This collaborative group chose to further concentrate on preventing suicides among youth and adults through the recently established Suicide Prevention Task Force, co-chaired by Megan Castellano, director

of the Mental Health Association, and Marla Behler, program coordinator for the Child Advocacy Center, both Putnam-based organizations.

**A growing body of research shows effective strategies do exist to improve MEB health and prevent suicide deaths.** MEB health promotion

*Continued on page 2.*

### Why? Why? Why? **HOW?** Why?

- Most suicide prevention efforts concentrate on trying to understand *why* people chose to end their lives.
- **Means Matter**, a public health campaign developed by the Harvard School of Public Health, focuses on *how* a person makes the attempt because this factor is key in whether he or she survives. Means Matter stresses limiting access to lethal means of suicide for someone contemplating it.

### Save the Date: **March 26**

- Guest speaker **Catherine Barber, MPA**, Harvard School of Public Health, and director of the Means Matter campaign, is scheduled to speak on reducing multiple lethal means for suicide. Ms. Barber co-founded the National Center for Suicide Prevention Training. She will be joined by Health Commissioner Allen Beals, MD, JD; Kristin McConnell, MS, executive director of the Putnam chapter of the National Council on Alcoholism and other Drug Dependencies (NCADD) and Glen Jackson, senior investigator, Putnam County Sheriff's Office. The event takes place Thursday, March 26, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, at the TOPS Building, 112 Old Route Six, Carmel.

Registration is required. There is no fee, but space is limited. Conference materials and continental breakfast will be provided. For more information and a registration form, visit the Mental Health Association website at [www.mhaputnam.org/](http://www.mhaputnam.org/)

## Suicide, guns and public health

Access to guns is an emotionally and politically charged subject. However, "lethal means reduction" is an important component of a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention. **Of 23 confirmed suicides in Putnam County in 2013 and 2014, 13 of them—nearly 60 percent—resulted from a gunshot.**

Consider the following characteristics of suicide:

- ▶ Many suicide attempts occur during a short-term crisis, with little planning.
- ▶ Intent alone does not determine whether an attempt will be successful—means also matter.
- ▶ Access to firearms is a risk factor for suicide. (See table on page 2.)
- ▶ Firearms used in youth suicide usually belong to a parent.
- ▶ 90 percent of those who attempt suicide but survive do not later die by suicide.
- ▶ Reducing access to lethal means saves lives.

**Source:** <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/>

# Inaugural Teen Health Day Draws Crowds

Nearly 100 high school students turned out for Teen Health Day on December 5, despite the chilly weather for the outdoor event. Teens flocked to the Carmel Fire Department where the Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH) had arranged information booths and a Westchester Medical Center mobile STD/HIV testing van. The PCDOH's public health communicable disease nurses and health educators, along with staff from the Putnam County Youth Bureau, were on hand to answer questions. Free giveaways included iPhone covers, water bottles, pens and more.

Free safe sex kits, free pregnancy tests, free glucose screenings, free mental health and substance abuse referrals and information were available, in addition to free and confidential HIV and STD screening.

STDs continue to be a significant health challenge facing New York State and Putnam County. Nationwide, the Centers for Disease Control estimates nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections occur every year in this country, with approximately 50 percent among young people ages 15–24, accounting for almost \$16 billion in health care costs. In Putnam County the highest rates of chlamydia continue to be among women, 20 to 24 years old, followed by those 15 to 19 years old.

Many cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis remain

undiagnosed and unreported, and data on several additional STDs—such as human papillomavirus, herpes simplex virus, and trichomoniasis—are not routinely reported to CDC. As a result, surveillance reports capture only a fraction of the true burden of STDs.

For the complete 2013 Sexually Transmitted Diseases Surveillance information, visit: [www.cdc.gov/std/stats](http://www.cdc.gov/std/stats)



PCDOH staff who braved the cold temperatures included from left, Pat Gormley, RN, public health nurse; Rachel Gressel, RN, MS, senior public health nurse, and Alexa Contreras, health educator.

## Mental Health Priority, *continued from page 1.*

is an emerging field and at this point county level baseline data is not yet available from NYSDOH. Significant challenges include determining depression prevalence in the county, assessing current local MEB health programs and investigating best practices to decrease stigma against mental health illnesses. A number of suicide prevention training opportunities have already been launched (see box at right) to increase community awareness of both warning signs and available resources, and an innovative public health campaign to reduce suicide numbers called “Means Matter,” is being implemented. This program aims to reduce access to lethal means. Putnam’s program will focus on making homes safer by decreasing access to both medications and firearms with a social marketing campaign targeting pharmacies, gun retail stores and the general public.

For more information, please call:

Marla Behler, MS, LMSW, CAC program coordinator, at 845-808-1400, ext. 44120, or email:

[marla.behler@putnamcountyny.gov](mailto:marla.behler@putnamcountyny.gov)

Megan Castellano, MPA, director, Mental Health Association in Putnam County, at 845-278-7600, ext. 202, or email: [mcastellano@mhaputnam.org](mailto:mcastellano@mhaputnam.org)

**Table: Suicides in States with the highest and lowest rates of gun ownership, 2001-2005.**

Variable	States with highest rates of gun ownership	States with lowest rates of gun ownership
Average population	49 million	50 million
Percent of households with guns	47	15
Total fire arms suicides	16,577	4,257
Total non-firearm suicides	9,172	9,259

*Source:* Drexler, M. *Harvard Public Health*, Spring 2013

## Suicide Prevention Trainings

**SafeTALK** is a basic three-hour training to enhance suicide alertness. It prepares participants to be able to recognize individuals thinking about suicide and connect them to suicide “first aid” resources.

*Open to all community members.*

**ASIST** is a two-day interactive workshop designed to enhance participants’ ability to not only recognize when an individual is at risk of suicide, but also to intervene safely and effectively. Participants learn how to successfully engage someone contemplating suicide in talking about his or her reasons. They also learn how to develop a plan and follow-up with the at-risk person.

*Open to all community members.* (May be particularly useful for clergy, nurses, police officers, security guards, resident assistants, and other community members such as bartenders and hairdressers who may find

themselves in unique situations listening to people unburden themselves.)

**Project CONNECT** is a postvention training to develop a planned community response to a death by suicide. The goals of postvention are to promote healing of those most directly affected, as well as those indirectly affected by the death, and to reduce risk of additional suicide deaths. Attendees learn about risk factors and warning signs of suicide, and safe messaging and cultural competency issues in order to communicate effectively while respecting individuals’ rights to confidentiality and privacy.

*By invitation.* If you are interested in more information or attending, please call the telephone number below.

**For further information** please call the Mental Health Association in Putnam County at 845-278-7600 x202. Or you can visit <http://www.mhaputnam.org> and search “suicide prevention.”

# Health Commissioner Speaks Out About Measles Vaccination

Health Commissioner Allen Beals writes a column on public health for a general audience that appears in *The Putnam County Courier*. It is also frequently published in *The Putnam County News and Recorder*. In this column he shares his experience and perspective on key public health issues.

In February, Dr. Beals took a strong stance commenting on the measles outbreak in southern California. Key excerpts from the piece, which was published on February 5, appear below:

Failure to immunize your child is a form of child abuse. It also shows irresponsibility as a member of a community. The current fourteen-state outbreak of measles is a serious concern, particularly for tiny babies....

....[Measles] is so contagious in enclosed areas such as doctors' waiting rooms, there have been a number of cases reported in California of physicians dropping patients who refuse immunizations without a sound medical reason, in order to protect other patients. The ethical responsibilities of physicians in such cases is currently the subject of hot debate by doctors and patients alike....

....Measles was declared eliminated in the U.S. in 2000 because a high rate of public immunity had been achieved by this exceedingly effective, and safe, two-dose regimen. Outbreaks only occur in the U.S. when unvaccinated people are exposed to "imported" measles. Unfortunately the virus is still widespread in many parts of the world and visitors can bring it here....Cases have been reported in nearby Dutchess County.



## PCDOH Starts Opioid Overdose Prevention Program

The recent rise in heroin overdose deaths in Putnam County has prompted the launch of a NYS-approved opioid overdose prevention program by the Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH). Thirty-three opioid-related fatalities occurred in the two-year period of 2012 and 2013, representing an increase of more than 120 percent from the 15 in 2010 and 2011. The PCDOH joins dozens of other counties in the state adopting this public health intervention that makes use of the antidote drug naloxone, essentially reversing the overdose.

Naloxone, which goes under the trade name Narcan<sup>®</sup>, blocks opioids in the nervous system for 30 to 90 minutes, providing enough time for transport to an emergency room. The

drug will be administered intranasally. (It is also available as an injectable drug). The PCDOH is providing the medication free of charge to law enforcement and other first responders once they complete the proper training.

Putnam County does not face this drug crisis alone. Drug overdose is a significant issue in the state and in fact the country, prompting the NYSDOH legislation that makes it legal for non-medical personnel to administer this prescription medicine to someone to keep an overdose from becoming fatal. The drug has been successfully prescribed and distributed to not only law enforcement, but also directly to heroin users, their families and friends in 15 states and Washington DC. The Harm Reduction Coalition reports that by the

end of 2010 over 50,000 kits had been distributed nationwide and over 10,000 overdoses had been reversed, saving that many lives.

The new program is in support of Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell's call for action in the "War on Addiction." The County Executive made this a prime focus in her recent 2015 Putnam County Budget Address, introducing a campaign of education and awareness to combat the problem while challenging all agencies, public and private, to collaborate and address the issue.

Further information on the opioid overdose prevention program is available at: [www.health.ny.gov](http://www.health.ny.gov) and search "opioid overdose prevention."



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**Helping patients with chronic disease live better lives**

**Physician management of patients with chronic disease can be difficult. Office time with patients has shrunk considerably and patients may not fully understand, or be compliant with, a providers’ directions or advice.** Now an evidence-based program may improve patient compliance, reduce re-hospitalizations and improve outcomes. Developed at Stanford University, it is offered as a complement to physician management in Putnam County through the PCDOH and the Office for Senior Resources. The free six-week Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) helps patients learn to self-manage their conditions between office visits. In the Putnam community, the program goes by the name Living Well Workshops.

**The next CDSMP patient workshop series is scheduled for Wednesdays, March 25 through April 29, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., at Putnam Hospital Center. Spaces are limited. Contact: Sarena Chisick, 845-279-5711, ext. 2702.**

*Improvements in sleep problems among the chronic disease self-management program participants.*

Ahn S, Jiang L, Smith ML, Ory MG

**ABSTRACT**

Sleep is increasingly important in public health because sleep problems are associated with multiple negative health and quality-of-life outcomes, especially among those with chronic conditions. While evidence-based self-management programs have been widely studied, little is known about their specific impacts on sleep. Using data from the National Study of Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (n = 1168), improvements in sleep problems were observed for all sub-groups except men. More sleep problem reductions were observed among younger participants compared with their older counterparts. This study confirmed the value of self-management programs for ameliorating sleep problems across diverse participant groups.

*Fam Community Health*, 2014. Oct-Dec. 37(4):327-35

One of nearly 100 abstracts available when you search "chronic disease self-management program" on Pub Med.