



Drug crisis is top health concern in Putnam County

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As part of its mission to improve and protect the health and well-being of local residents, the Putnam County Department of Health recently published its Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan. Through the combined effort of over 91 community organizations and five community-wide coalitions, over 600 Putnam residents responded to questions that focused on the health of our county and gave residents a chance to express what they feel are the most important health issues facing our community. The report (found at www.putnamcountyny.com) will serve as a guide for future goals and strategies to improve the health of all Putnam County residents.

One of the questions posed to residents was to identify the most important health issue that needs immediate focus in our community. For Mahopac residents, along with several other towns, including Carmel, Kent, and Patterson, the top answer: drug abuse. Taking into account the use of both prescription and illegal drugs, respondents felt that focusing on prevention and treatment of drug abuse is a priority for the community. This answer may not come as a surprise to many, as the U.S. is facing what the Centers for Disease Control (www.cdc.gov) refers to as an “epidemic,” particularly in terms of opioid overdoses. The

CDC reports that the majority of overdose deaths from prescription opioids (medications such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone that are typically prescribed to treat pain) have more than quadrupled since 1999. From 2000 to 2015, more than half a million people died from drug overdoses, and the majority of these overdoses involve opioids—both prescription and heroin.

The second priority for Mahopac respondents is to promote mental health. Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety often go untreated, with fewer than half of those in need receiving help. According to the Putnam Department of Health, there have been 43 suicides in our county between 2013 and November 2016, indicating a strong need to address the challenges and pressures facing not only adults, but our younger residents.

Finally, the third most important focus

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—Center for Disease Control and Prevention

according to Mahopac respondents is to address alcohol abuse. The Putnam Department of Health remarks, “Binge drinking (men who have five or more drinks and women who have four or more drinks on one occasion) has been an identified health issue in Putnam County for many years,” with concern not only for adults, but for school aged children as well. In addition, the U.S. Surgeon General’s recent report has nearly 21 million Americans who are facing a substance

disorder involving alcohol and/or drugs. Only one in 10 receive treatment.

These top three health issues—substance abuse, mental health, and alcohol abuse—are often co-occurring, and also share a significant barrier to getting help: stigma. Stigma describes the negative perceptions and attitudes that are often associated with alcohol and substance use, and particularly with mental illness. The effects of stigma

include individuals feeling reluctant to get help, lack of understanding of the condition and treatment possibilities, feeling isolated from friends and family, and possible discrimination. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org), “Stigma is one of the most challenging aspects of living with a mental health condition. It causes people to feel ashamed for something that is out of their control and prevents many from seeking the help they need and speaking out.” Although nearly one in five American adults will experience a mental health issue within a given year, only one-quarter of those with a psychological condition feel that others are understanding or compassionate about their illness, according to the CDC.

Residents are encouraged to read the report in its entirety, and the Putnam County Department of Health seeks residents who want to partner with them by joining a coalition or focus group or responding to future surveys. If you are interested, call 845-808-1390 or send an email to PutnamHealth@putnamcountyny.gov.

If you or someone you know is facing alcohol use, substance use or mental health issues, always call 911 in an emergency. In addition, agencies such as Putnam Family & Community Services are also available to meet the needs of individuals of all ages in our community. Call 845-225-2700 or visit www.pfcsinc.org or www.facebook.com/PFCSinc/.



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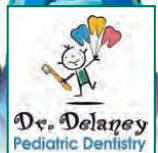
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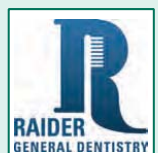
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