**STEP BY STEP 9/6/17**

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**OPIOID ADDICTION: AN EPIDEMIC IN OUR COMMUNITY**

In many rural counties across America, an opioid epidemic is quietly raging through our communities. What begins as a prescription for pain relief after an injury can end in dependence or addiction. Mendocino County averages two deaths from unintentional prescription opioid overdose each month. That is, per capita, twice the state average.

**OPIOID FAST FACTS:**

* An opioid is any pain relieving medication or drug (Vicodin, Oxycodone, Oxycontin, Norco, etc.) that resembles morphine in its physiological or pharmacological effects.
* In 2015, opioid deaths in the US reached 33,092, nearly 5,000 more than the year before . . .

and this number is climbing every year.

* Each day, nearly 44 people die in the US from an overdose of prescription pain killers.

Opioids are extremely effective in reducing acute pain. They are indispensable for cancer patients and for those facing end- of-life medical conditions. However, for most patients, opioids stop working after two months of use. Overtime, opioids change the chemistry in the brain, and after using them for just a month the risk of addiction dramatically increases.

Some addicted persons turn to readily available (and less expensive) heroin. A new trend is an increase in the use of heroin laced with Fetanyl, a powerful, synthetic opioid analgesic that is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent. This high potency greatly increases risk of overdose, especially if a person who uses drugs is unaware that a powder or pill contains Fentanyl.

**LOCAL EFFORTS . . . SAFE RX MENDOCINO OPIOID SAFETY COALITION**

Opioid safety coalitions have formed in 31 California counties, including Mendocino. Safe Rx Mendocino is a coalition of concerned community members, medical professionals, educators, law enforcement, and community based organizations who are taking a community approach to safe management of prescription painkillers in our county. The coalition is a vital resource in the fight against this epidemic, providing education, safe prescribing, support, treatment and community safety. You can reach them at 707-472-2727 or visit [www.saferxmendocino.com](http://www.saferxmendocino.com).

**Monthly Challenge:** Are you, or do you know someone, struggling with this addiction? Contact Safe Rx Mendocino or reach out to that friend or family member by giving them the contact information for Safe Rx Mendocino.

**Avenues to Wellness** was created especially for inland Mendocino County by the Frank R. Howard Foundation. Visit [www.avenuestowellness.org](http://www.avenuestowellness.org) or email suzanne.avenuestowellness@gmail.com for more information and for the upcoming ATW Speaker Series presentation on Mental Health at the Willits Center for the Arts.