

HEROIN EPIDEMIC PUBLIC HEARING APRIL 21, 2016
TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL S. HANNON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JUNIATA VALLEY TRI-COUNTY DRUG & ALCOHOL ABUSE COMMISSION

I. INTRODUCTION

Good morning my name is Michael Hannon, Executive Director of the Juniata Valley Tri-County Drug and Alcohol Abuse Commission. The Commission is the Single County Authority for the Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata County region. I am a lifelong resident of Mifflin County and have been an employee of the Commission for the past 19 years. I have served in my current capacity as the Executive Director for the last seven years. Like many of my fellow presenters, I am proud to be a resident of Mifflin County and am equally proud to serve the Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata County region.

Seven years ago, when I took on my role as the Executive Director of the Commission our three counties were experiencing the final stages of our own heroin epidemic. The epidemic began in early 2000 and came to an end around 2006 or 2007. The crisis at that time received national attention to the point that MSNBC featured Lewistown as a town being devastated by heroin use and abuse. The MSNBC Special was titled "Along Comes the Horse". Only a few years into my professional career I learned a valuable lesson, after we began seeing heroin in our community I realized that heroin does not discriminate. Heroin and opiate addiction will hurt anyone who comes in contact with it. Heroin destroyed many people I grew up with, it even touched my own family. I personally know people who have overdosed, I also personally knew people who died from overdoses.

It was a difficult time for our community but through collaboration and the tireless work of many we overcame the epidemic. Unfortunately, in just a few short years here we are again, heroin and opiate addiction is in our community. I want to personally thank Senator Jake Corman as well as the Center for Rural Pennsylvania for being pro active in making this hearing possible. The biggest difference I see this time is that our community recognizes the epidemic and, more importantly, Harrisburg recognizes the huge task in front of us.

CHALLENGES IN RURAL PA

- 1) **Stigma** – prevention and education is needed by the community, agencies, and schools
- 2) **Staffing** - The Commission has a total of 5 staff who performs all functions of the Commission. The Commission provides services to individuals who are suffering from Drug and Alcohol addiction and seeking screening, assessment, and case Management services. We coordinate prevention and intervention service for the three counties. The Commission provided and/or authorized services to 4,401 individuals in 2014/15. Staffing continues to be a great concern in facing this epidemic. The Commission has TWO Case Managers, ONE prevention Specialist who serves SEVEN school districts, ONE Fiscal Officer, and ONE Executive Director.
- 3) **Transportation** - Historically transportation is a barrier for Rural PA and it is no different

here in the Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata County region. With no true public transportation and services being 45 to 60 minutes away at times it is often difficult for individuals to consistently find transportation.

- 4) **“Doc Shops”** - It is not uncommon for individuals to seek out Doctors who prescribe Suboxone. The individual pays cash for services and prescriptions often exceed the necessary dose. In return, individuals sell a portion of their prescribed medication to fund their own doctor appointments. “Doc Shops” rarely require counseling or support groups that assist in maintaining long term sobriety.
- 5) **Funding Cuts** - Base funding cuts over the years to drug and alcohol programs continue to put the squeeze on SCA’s as the demand for treatment increases. The cost of staff training, the overhead cost of facilities, the increased reporting, rising insurance rates, much higher deductibles, and co –pays for employees and clients we serve contribute to financial strain of delivering quality services.
- 6) **Capacity** - Currently there are not enough inpatient beds in the Commonwealth to meet the demand. A few short years ago an individual seeking in patient treatment could access treatment almost immediately. Unfortunately, in todays world it is not uncommon to wait 4 or 5 days and in some cases weeks to find a bed.

Like many of my fellow speakers I could go on and on concerning the barriers we face.

However, at this time, I would like to turn the page and tell you about the great things we are doing here to stop the heroin and opiate abuse in our community.

SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

- 1) **Naloxone** – Currently in our three county region the State Police are the only police carrying naloxone. On May 18th the Commission will be hosting a Naloxone training. David Flalko from The Council of Southeast Pennsylvania will be the Trainer. The purpose of the training is to educate and provide information to those who attend. Currently there between 75 and 85 individuals registered. The Training was offered to all Police Departments, School Districts, County Commissioners, District Attorneys, Judges, Providers, and various human service agencies throughout the region.
- 2) **Prescription Drop off Boxes** - Within our region there are multiple Prescription Drop off Boxes. We are currently in Discussion with Mifflin Counties District Attorney about getting one more for Mifflin County. In addition to the take back boxes the Commission is in the process of developing information packets for funeral directors to give to those who lost a family member and has questions on how to dispose of unused medications.
- 3) **Opiate synopsis** - I am proud to say that our three counties had 12 people in attendance at the Opiate Synopsis held earlier this year in Camp Hill. The synopsis was well done and well attended.
- 4) **PA STOP** – Promotion of PA STOP on the local level
- 5) **Town Hall Meeting** - Juniata County held a Town Hall meeting which was very well

attended. Garry Tennis spoke at the Town Hall meeting and his time was very much appreciated.

- 6) **Warm Handoff** - Due mainly to lack of funding and inability to fund an additional Position, our Warm handoff is not as strong as we would like but we do the best we can. The Commission along with hospital staff has established an after hour protocol for admission to inpatient treatment, unfortunately bed availability continues to be an issue. In instances when a person cannot be admitted directly to a facility the patient receives a packet of educational information and local resources to connect with to pursue needed services post discharge
- 7) **Provider Expansion** - Our provider in Huntingdon will be opening an office in Mount Union. Mount Union has been hit the hardest over the last few weeks and is an area of need and concern. This office will address transportation concerns as well as a demand for services. The Provider has agree to allow the Commission Staff to utilize the office for assessments and case management services.
- 8) **Prevention and Intervention** - The Commission continues to promote and fund numerous prevention and intervention programs and activities throughout the region.
- 9) **Staffing Changes** - In order to meet high demand for services the Commission has dedicated one staff to be in Huntingdon County to handle the high demand for assessments and services.

- 10) MAT Services - Currently there are two Suboxone Programs within the three counties. The first is Family Health Associates and the second is Universal Community Behavior Health. Both programs are well run and service many people and needs.

IN CONCLUSION

I would like to thank the panel for the opportunity to testify concerning the epidemic that we are faced with. I urge ample funding to fund programs and services. Through sufficient funding and collaborative efforts locally and statewide we can overcome this crisis. Locally we fought this battle 10 or 15 years ago and won, we can do it again!