

## **Charting a Course for Nebraska**

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In recent years, many across our state have been in discussion regarding the growing concern of prescription drug abuse and the need for Nebraska's answer to this problem. This year, the Unicameral answered by unanimously passing Senator Sara Howard's LB471, creating Nebraska's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program.

Nebraska's PDMP will aid in "preventing the misuse of controlled substances . . . and allowing prescribers and dispensers to monitor the care and treatment of patients for whom such a prescription drug is prescribed to ensure that such prescription drugs are used for medically appropriate purposes".

Beginning in 2017, all licensed dispensaries will be required to report prescription information for certain controlled substances to the PDMP. Nebraska DHHS CEO Courtney Phillips states, "[Through] a mandatory reporting law that will become effective January 1, 2017, and our partnerships with physicians across the state, we will lower the risk of opioid addictions and opioid-related deaths."

While Nebraska answers the call for the implementation of a PDMP, we must be aware that on the heels of this valuable records system, there can occur a backlash of unintended consequences. Rising heroin and fentanyl addiction and overdose can emerge when opioids become more closely monitored. We certainly know we don't want to win one battle but lose the war.

My own awareness of this possible repercussion has been shaped through my conversations with other Attorneys General from across the United States--hearing their stories of devastation stemming from their communities and seeing the maps of their states that highlight, over a five-year period of time, the opioid crisis expanding from a sprinkling to a blanketing of the landscape. This provided me with a dramatic and lethal portrayal of human suffering.

These narratives helped to shape not only my understanding of the scope of the problem, but serve as a significant warning to me for our state. It became evident that not that only did we need to hold back this scourge from enveloping our borders, but it would take a concerted effort on the part of many to determine a course for remedy.

Our office reached out to UNMC Chancellor, Dr. Jeffrey Gold, to ask if he was interested in partnering with us for an Opioid Summit to provide the vehicle for this mapping of the future for our state. He immediately affirmed his commitment and even opened the doors to the Med Center for hosting the event.

Recognizing the importance of a multi-level response to this challenge, we also asked U.S. Attorney Deb Gilg and DHHS, through Governor Ricketts, to join us in this effort.

My desire is to build a collaborative force to press against this adversity coming to fruition in our state. The October 14<sup>th</sup> Opioid Summit in Omaha will provide a first, front line of this effort. It is not intended to be a single event but signal the building of our work together in protecting Nebraska and charting a response for our future.

CDC Director Tom Frieden, M.D., M.P.H. summarizes succinctly, “To reverse this trend (heroin use) we need an all-of-society response – to improve opioid prescribing practices to prevent addiction, expand access to effective treatment for those who are addicted, increase use of naloxone to reverse overdoses, and work with law enforcement partners like DEA to reduce the supply of heroin.”

The figures coming out of the CDC provide a substantive statistical report, but it is the headlines and news clips illustrating much too vividly for us the human havoc of addiction and death.

In our specific role as law enforcement, I look forward to working closely with multiple agencies and organizations across many disciplines in the areas of prevention and treatment. And hopefully, together we can provide a success story in Nebraska of battling the opiate epidemic.