

Trillium Talks  
Lines for Life  
By Dwight Holton

Across Oregon, physicians are joining with others to end the epidemic of opioid abuse. From Enterprise to Lane County, in cities and rural communities, doctors are working to change our approach to pain management and opioid prescribing.

At Lines for Life, we are bringing together key players across health systems and beyond to develop regional Action Plans for reducing opioid abuse. At the request of the Governor and Oregon Health Authority, we launched the Oregon Coalition for Responsible Use of Meds (OrCRM) to hold regional summits to develop and implement regional solutions to the opioid crisis. We've identified four key goals:

- Reducing the number of pills in circulation with better prescribing and better access to alternatives
- Better disposal of disused meds
- Improved access to Medication Assisted Treatment
- Community and provider pain education

Physicians are leading the way. In Eastern Oregon, doctors have convened a pain guidance group to develop prescribing guidelines. In Portland metro, prescribers joined health systems in adopting new standards for pain management and prescribing. In Central Oregon, doctors joined with behavioral health clinicians and others to endorse Pain Standards and are working to expand access to Medication Assisted Treatment. Providers in the Willamette Valley and on the Coast have launched clinics specializing in alternatives to opioids for pain management. Doctors in Southern Oregon – longtime leaders in the field -- are working to improve access to naloxone, the life-saving overdose reversal drug. In Lane County a group of providers established a chronic pain work group to identify non opioid alternatives for the treatment of chronic pain. In collaboration with Trillium, providers and the community are beginning to work on an action plan to treat chronic pain and reduce the abuse and misuse of opioids.

The challenge is daunting. Oregon ranks second in the nation in misuse of opioids – with over 100 million opioid pills prescribed each year. Evidence is mounting that opioids offer little help in treating chronic pain – while more studies show the risk of dependence: 60% of patients on opioids for 3 months will still be taking the drugs in 5 years, according to one study – and nearly half who take opioids for just 30 days will still be on opioids 3 years later.

With physician leadership, we can end this epidemic, improve patient care, and avoid creating a generation lost to dependence on opioids. Lines for Life and OrCRM applaud the energy, creativity and effectiveness that physicians bring to helping us meet this desperate crisis.

The issue is gaining national attention and has been highlighted recently by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley. Senator Wyden attended the Eugene stakeholder meeting February 16, to hear from the community about the challenges of treating chronic pain. Following listening sessions in Eugene and Portland, Senator Wyden made a public statement at the Senate Finance Committee Hearing on Opioids February 23. He indicated that the Finance Committee is required to pay for the most important health programs in the nation, and should do its part to address the opioid crisis. In the coming years, Medicare and Medicaid are expected to account for over a third of substance abuse-related spending. Senator Jeff Merkley released a statement after the U.S. Senate held a bipartisan vote to bring a bill to the floor to help take on the growing opioid crisis across America. “I’ve heard heartbreaking stories from families across Oregon about the devastation that opioid abuse and heroin addiction has brought to their loved ones. Addiction is a disease, and we need to do everything in our power to help Americans successfully combat this challenge.”

Please register to attend the Lane County Summit to Manage Chronic Pain and Reduce Rx Abuse scheduled Wednesday April 20, 8 AM-4:30 PM at the LCC Center for Meeting and Learning—4000 E. 30th, Eugene. The Summit will be a full day of education for healthcare providers, pharmacies, behavioral health treatment providers, educators, law enforcement, public health, social service organizations and thought leaders to build tools to treat chronic pain and identify Rx use challenges and solutions, including those unique to Lane County. Summit attendees will learn about non-opiate alternatives to managing chronic pain and will finalize the Lane County Action Plan to reduce overdose, abuse and misuse of prescription drugs. Copy and paste the registration link in your browser to register for the event.

<http://www.eventbrite.com/e/managing-chronic-pain-tickets-22425839289> I look forward to engaging your efforts in this important work.

Dwight Holton is the CEO of Lines for Life and the chair of OrCRM.  
Parts of this article appeared previously in the OMA newsletter.