

**WESTERN SIERRA MEDICAL CLINIC RECEIVES \$759,000 GRANT FOR  
PRESCRIPTION PAIN MEDICATION, HEROIN SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT  
SERVICES**

*Nonprofit will work with local agencies to develop program to help opioid users*

GRASS VALLEY—Western Sierra Medical Clinic has been awarded a major federal grant to improve and expand substance abuse treatment services, especially for residents addicted to opioids such as prescription pain medications and heroin, a critical and fast-growing problem nationally and in the region.

The \$759,000 grant will allow Western Sierra, a nonprofit community health center, to collaborate with local agencies to develop a medication-assisted treatment program for opioid abuse in Nevada and Sierra counties. Western Sierra, the largest outpatient provider in the region, will add providers and other staff as part of the two-year grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“The opioid epidemic is a major issue nationally and in the communities we serve, and the grant provides much-needed funding to establish the community’s first medication-assisted treatment program to serve residents,” said Western Sierra Medical Clinic CEO Scott McFarland. “We’re extremely excited about receiving the grant, which gives us the funding to build on the work we have been doing, hire more staff and expand the services needed to more effectively treat the problem in collaboration with community partners.”

McFarland added that Western Sierra is committed to combating substance abuse problems in the community, and is investing more than \$320,000 towards the new program.

The medication-assistance treatment program will especially help the underserved, including teenagers dealing with an addiction to heroin or prescription pain medications, such as Vicodin, OxyContin and Percocet. This treatment program is a safe and effective strategy for decreasing the frequency and quantity of opioid use.

Pain prescription medication abuse is a critical issue for Nevada County, which had the fifth-highest rate of non-fatal emergency room visits related to opioids in the state in 2013, according to the California Department of Public Health. The Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital emergency room handled 138 opioid-related cases in 2014, an 80 percent increase from the 27 in 2011.

“Our grant application effectively outlined the need for funding the program, but any of our clinicians could detail the impact of prescription pain medication and heroin abuse in the

region,” said Dr. Robert “Simi” Lyss, Chief Medical Officer of Western Sierra Medical Clinic. “But this is really all about people and how opioid use has affected their lives, the lives of their families and the entire region.”

Western Sierra has been working on treating substance abuse in the region for the past five years, including a clinic at Community Recovery Resources (CoRR), a recovery and wellness clinician in Grass Valley.

“It’s a growing problem in our community, and the federal funding will help with increasing both outreach and treatment services,” said Warren Daniels, CEO of Community Recovery Resources. “Opiates and pain medication are so easy to get addicted to, and this program will save lives.”

Western Sierra will add clinicians, including a health education coordinator and teen liaison, as part of the grant.

The grant will also allow the nonprofit to integrate health care, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment, said Dr. Christina Lasich, who joins Western Sierra on April 1 and will serve as the Director of the Medication Assisted Treatment program. She is a University of California, Davis School of Medicine graduate who has been most recently the Medical Director for Community Recovery Resources. Lasich has been in private practice focusing on pain management in Grass Valley since 2001.

“The integrated, wellness-centered approach is proven far more effective than just focusing on one specific area,” Lasich said. “Quite often, those who abuse prescription pain medications are dealing with numerous health issues that go well beyond just the addiction.”

And the abuse of opioids has a far-reaching effect on the community, from crime to the demand on health care, especially at the Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital emergency room, said local health leaders.

“Early intervention and education efforts are the first steps in facing the issue,” said Michael Heggarty, Nevada County Health and Human Services Agency Director. “This grant provides the opportunity and the resources to develop a multipronged approach to combating the problem.”

“A local medication-assisted treatment services program will be a valuable resource for providing discrete and accessible assistance, creating an environment conducive to a safer and healthier community,” said Darden Bynum, Sierra County Health and Human Services Agency Director.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded a total of \$94 million to 271 health centers nationwide, including 36 in California, for medication-assisted treatment programs.

About 4.5 million Americans abuse prescription pain killers, with another 289,000 addicted to heroin.

“Substance abuse, especially in the form of opioid addiction, is growing at a rapid pace in neighborhoods across the nation, including in the North State,” said U.S. Congressman Doug LaMalfa, who represents the region. “I am pleased that funding is being allocated to help fight this trend in our region and I look forward to working with Western Sierra to ensure they have the resources and tools necessary to continue these efforts.”

#### **About Western Sierra Medical Clinic**

Western Sierra Medical Clinic provides comprehensive medical, dental and behavioral health care in Nevada, Sierra and Yuba counties. Founded in 1975, Western Sierra emphasizes preventive care, education and empowering patients to make informed decisions. Western Sierra is the largest outpatient health care provider in Nevada County, with a new full-service health center that is meeting the growing demands in the community. You can learn more about Western Sierra Medical Clinic at [www.wsmcmed.org](http://www.wsmcmed.org) and on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/WesternSierraMedicalClinic](https://www.facebook.com/WesternSierraMedicalClinic).

#### **About the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Grant**

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