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Western Sierra Medical Clinic adds specially trained clinicians to help combat substance abuse

Prescription pain medications, heroin large focus of program

By Western Sierra Medical Clinic -
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GRASS VALLEY, Calif. November 15, 2016 – Western Sierra Medical Clinic has expanded and improved its substance abuse treatment services in recent weeks, with the addition of specially trained health care professionals joining the newly established medication-assisted treatment (MAT) program.

Western Sierra’s MAT program helps residents addicted to drugs, especially those battling opioids such as prescription pain medications and heroin, a critical and fast-growing epidemic in the region and nationwide.

Prescription pain medication abuse is a critical issue for Nevada County, for example, which had the fifth-highest rate of non-fatal emergency room visits related to opioids in the state, according to the latest figures from the California Department of Public Health. Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital in Grass Valley has reported an 80 percent increase in opioid-related cases during the past few years.

“The purpose of the medication-assisted treatment program is to curb the escalation of opioid abuse and opioid-related deaths, especially in rural areas like Nevada, Sierra and Placer counties,” said Western Sierra CEO Scott McFarland. “The opioid epidemic has a far-reaching effect on our community, from crime and health care to families and employers. We’re committed to addressing the issue and helping as many residents combat substance abuse as possible.”

The medication-assisted treatment program will be available to those dealing with an addiction to heroin or prescription pain medications such as Vicodin, OxyContin and Percocet. Community members with health insurance to those who depend on government programs to teenagers and young adults are eligible for the program. The MAT program is an effective and safe way to reduce the frequency and quantity of opioid use.

“At Western Sierra, we take our mission to combat substance abuse very seriously. said Dr. Christina Lasich, Director of the Medication Assisted Treatment Program for Western Sierra. “We are working towards improved access to care for those who want help with opioid use disorder. We also have many programs that will help prevent opioid-overdose deaths.”

Those interested in applying for or learning more about the MAT program can call Western Sierra Medical Clinic at 530-274-9762 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays or a 24/7 hotline at 855-HOPE-4-YOU.

Western Sierra – the largest outpatient health provider in the region, serving about one of every four residents – has been aggressively addressing substance abuse disorder for the past five years in partnership with Community Recovery Resources (CoRR), a recovery and wellness facility in Grass Valley, where Western Sierra has a primary care clinic.

The program elevates the level of services provided and increases the number of residents who will receive treatment.

Residents dealing with substance abuse, especially opioids, are encouraged to register for the MAT program. Patients will be treated at the Western Sierra health center at 844 Old Tunnel Road in Grass Valley. However, the MAT program will eventually expand to other Western Sierra health centers, including its new centers in Placer County.

Western Sierra has added a registered nurse, Laura Zieman, who has extensive experience in dealing with opioid dependence. She will work closely with Dr. Lasich and coordinate with the rest of the MAT team. Zieman's previous experience includes providing and coordinating adult mental health care for Nevada County Behavioral Health.

Other team members include a youth outreach coordinator focusing on preventive education, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and substance abuse counselor specially trained on the MAT program.

The program will integrate behavioral health, substance abuse and health care treatment, said Lasich, a longtime pain and addiction medicine specialist. The MAT program offers a holistic approach – for example, emphasizing the importance of diet and exercise – and support groups as part of the treatment.

"We're always focused on addressing the cause of an issue, not just merely treating the problem or the symptoms," said Dr. Heather Lucas-Ross, Chief Medical Officer of Western Sierra. "And substance abuse is a very complicated issue that requires special training from clinicians and tremendous dedication and hard work from patients to be successful."

Local agencies also play a critical role and Western Sierra, a nonprofit organization, is working closely with them on the MAT program, including Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital, Chapa-de, Nevada County Superintendent of Schools and Nevada County Health & Human Services, among others.

For example, Lasich recently spoke with Grass Valley Police Department officers about how to reduce deaths related to opioids, including the use of Narcan (also known as naloxone) that can reverse potentially fatal respiratory problems caused by opioid overdoses.

“This is a community wide issue, and it’s going to take a commitment from everyone to defeat the problem,” McFarland said.

About Western Sierra Medical Clinic

Western Sierra Medical Clinic provides comprehensive medical, dental and behavioral health care in Nevada, Sierra, Yuba counties, and recently expanded to Placer County. Western Sierra has opened an Auburn health center, with another health center to open soon in the community. Western Sierra will also open a health center in Kings Beach-Tahoe and another in Penn Valley (Nevada County). Founded in 1975, Western Sierra emphasizes preventive care, education and empowering patients to make informed decisions. You can learn more about Western Sierra Medical Clinic at <http://www.wsmcmed.org> and on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/WesternSierraMedicalClinic>.