



The Maryland State Medical Society

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OPIOIDS TALKING AND HOPE

Op-ed in Center Maryland, by Gene M. Ransom, III

The Maryland General Assembly is considering countless measures to attack the opioid crisis in Maryland. Many are with merit and some need work. Two proposals stand out as comprehensive real solutions to the problem, and have the support of MedChi, The Maryland Medical Society, other public health groups and officials. Those proposals are the Start Talking Maryland Act and the Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act of 2017.

The Start Talking Maryland Act, introduced by Senate President Mike Miller and Delegate Eric Bromwell (SB 1060/HB 1082) recognizes the critical importance of expanding public outreach, education, and intervention as a component of the State's response to the increasing incidences of substance misuse, addiction, and overdose. The legislation appropriately identifies drug courts, public schools, and institutions of higher education as essential components of a comprehensive strategy to increase public awareness of the growing epidemic. The Act also seeks to ensure those institutions have access to adequate resources to develop appropriate education and outreach programs to achieve the objectives of the legislation.

In addition to the expansion of programs to enhance public awareness and the education of our children on drug addiction and prevention, Senate Bill 1060 also recognizes the importance of ensuring that schools and institutions of higher education are equipped and authorized to respond to overdose incidences by training and authorizing school nurses and campus police to administer naloxone or other overdose reversing medication. It also allows schools and institutions of higher education to stock those medications so that they will be equipped to respond to an overdose.

The Heroin and Opioid Prevention Effort (HOPE) and Treatment Act of 2017, introduced by Senator Kathy Klausmier and Delegate Eric Bromwell (SB 967 HB 1329) proposes a number of notable initiatives some of which are also reflected in separate legislative initiatives. However, considered in concert, they provide a comprehensive framework for addressing Maryland's escalating substance abuse, addiction, and overdose crisis.

Included in Senate Bill 967 are:

- Requirements for higher education institutions that award degrees for licensure of health care providers to offer courses related to substance use disorders and pain management;
- Establishment of at least 10 crisis treatment centers across the state that are available 24/7 to address the immediate needs of individuals experiencing a substance disorder crisis;
- Development of a toll-free health crisis hotline that is available 24/7 to assist callers with the identification of appropriate resources to address substance use and mental health disorders;
- Provisions for ensuring there is access through health care facilities to health care providers who can provide the full range of opioid addiction medications including buprenorphine prescribers;
- Enhanced reimbursement provisions of community behavioral health providers ("Keep the Door Open");

- Requirements for hospital discharge protocols to include coordination with peer review counselors for SBIRT and provision of naloxone;
- Clarification that coverage for behavioral health services by insurers is in conformance with the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and includes coverage in residential treatment centers and outpatient and intensive outpatient benefits;
- A requirement for the Maryland State Department of Education to develop a plan for regional recovery schools; and
- A requirement of the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services, in collaboration with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and stakeholders to develop a plan to increase substance abuse treatment in State prisons and local jails.

These two bills are hard to boil down into simple press talking points. They contain complex details and may not be as easily drafted to garner quick headlines. They do contain real common sense solutions and a detailed plan to the opioid crisis. We need to educate our youth on the unique dangers of these drugs. We need victims of this illness to have access to care when they realize they need help. We need Start Talking and Hope to fight the heroin crisis.

About MedChi

MedChi, The Maryland State Medical Society, is a non-profit membership association of Maryland physicians. Formed in 1799, it is still the largest physician organization in Maryland today. The mission of MedChi is to serve as Maryland's foremost advocate and resource for physicians, their patients and the public health of Maryland. For more information, please visit www.medchi.org.

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