Editorial: Hospitals need to lead on heroin

By: Thomas P. Fiebelkorn, M.D.

In October, the Missouri legislature passed an omnibus bill providing $8 million to combat the opioid crisis. Missouri hospitals were called upon to help lead the fight against the opioid epidemic. We have been engaged in the battle for a decade, and on that front, Missouri hospitals have been, and continue to be, leaders in the fight.

But it is not just leaders in the public health community who are taking action. Many hospitals are also taking steps to address the crisis. The University of Missouri-Columbia Medical Center and the University of Missouri-Kansas City have established a “heroin treatment” program, which includes the provision of medication to treat opioid dependency. The University of Missouri-St. Louis has also established a program to provide medication for opioid dependence.

And yet, despite these efforts, the opioid epidemic continues to grow. The number of opioid deaths in Missouri has increased by 60% since 2015, and the number of opioid prescriptions written in the state has increased by 40% since 2010.

We must do more. Missouri hospitals must continue to lead the fight against the opioid epidemic. They must provide more resources for treatment and prevention, and they must work with the state and federal government to address this crisis.

The United States is experiencing an epidemic of opioid overdose deaths. Center for Disease Control and Prevention

It is a call to action for hospital chief executives to collaborate with other health-related organizations to create a new system of care for addiction. There are many routes to addiction, including the use of different drugs, lifestyles, family histories. The question of how many and who will pay for treatment.

It is a time to consider what the hospitals should be doing. The hospital CEO’s could start by meeting and creating a system of care for addiction. They could even make a small change in the system. In January, the head of the Ohio Hospital Association’s new program, Mainstream, Ohio, created its own heroin crisis plan. Mainstream, Ohio, is a program to provide medication for opioid dependence.

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