

**Gaston Community Healthcare Commission**  
**Minutes of the Gaston Controlled Substances Coalition**  
**Community Room, Gaston County Police Department**  
**April 28, 2017      7:30 to 9:00AM**

**Attending**

- Costa Andreou, MD, CaroMont
- Yvonne Boafo, DHHS-Public Health
- Patty Brooks, Gaston Together
- Charles Chapman, GEMS
- Todd Davis, MD, CaroMont
- Tiffany Donally, DHHS-Social Services
- Kayla Earley, DHHS-Public Health
- Jeffrey Ellison, PhD, GFHS
- William Gross, Gaston Together/GCHC
- Barbara Hallisey, Partners BHM
- Thomas Henry, PharmD, CaroMont
- Erin Hultgren, GFHS
- Capt. Steven Jentsch, Gaston Co. Police Department
- Becky Jones, Phoenix Counseling
- Brittain Kenney, Gaston DHHS
- Chrys Kolodny, DHHS-Public Health
- Adam Lawson, *Gaston Gazette*
- Donna Lockett, Gaston Together
- Melanie Lowrance, DHHS-Social Services
- Michelle Mathis, Olive Branch Ministries
- Maceo Mayo, RHA-Prevention
- Misty McIntosh, Community Health Partners
- Ruth Murphy, DHHS-Social Services
- Shirley Ocloo, MD, GFHS
- Ami Parker, Gaston County Schools
- Debra Safrit, Gaston Medical Associates
- Andrew Schrag, Partners BHM
- Joseph Shepherd, DHHS-Social Services
- Cheri Singleton, DHHS-Public Health
- Velma Taormina, MD, DHHS-Public Health
- Anne Wheeler, Community Health Partners

**Welcome and Introductions.** Velma Taormina, MD, Chairperson, convened the meeting at 7:32 AM and welcomed the members, who introduced themselves and stated their affiliations. Erin Hultgren, GFHS, Joe Shepherd, DHHS-Social Services, Yvonne Boafo, DHHS-Public Health, and Adam Lawson, *Gaston Gazette* were attending the Coalition meeting for the first time.

**Minutes of February 24, 2017.** After Dr. Taormina noted the date of the minutes need to be changed to February 24, 2017, Dr. Andreou moved to accept the minutes, Dr. Ellison seconded the motion, which the Coalition unanimously approved.

**Updates: Implementing our Strategic Plan**

Dr. Taormina stated our three committees are actively implementing our Strategic Plan.

**Policy Adoption Committee.** Dr. Ocloo stated the focus of the Policy Adoption Committee is to keep the opioid issue before prescribers in the community. The committee's current focus is participating in the Speed Dating CME program to be held on June 8, 2017 at CaroMont Regional Medical Center for Gaston County physicians, dentists, podiatrists, and midlevel practitioners. It will feature a speaker from the NC Medical Board who will present new rules for continuing medical education requirements on opioids. In addition, two of the three brief sessions – hence the term speed dating – will address opioids: Ammar Alamarie, MD, a chronic pain specialist with CaroMont Health will discuss strategies for limiting the use of narcotics to control pain, and Cecilia Novitt, MD, with the VA Hospital in Salisbury, NC, will discuss the use of alternative medicine modalities to control pain.

Dr. Ocloo also stated the committee will soon develop a full-CME program to be held in fall 2017.

Dr. Ocloo introduced Erin Hultgren, HIV and Hepatitis C Program Manager with Gaston Family Health Services (GFHS). Ms. Hultgren briefly described the Hepatitis C testing program for Baby Boomers, or individuals born between 1946 and 1964. GFHS and Gaston DHHS-Public Health conduct screenings at no charge and GFHS treats persons who test positive. Following a question on mobile screeners, Dr. Taormina stated the Gaston HIV Outreach Program, an initiative of DHHS-Public Health, also tests for HIV and Hepatitis C at set community locations and is open to working at new community sites.

### **Treatment Linkages Committee.**

Ms. Hallisey, the new committee chairperson, reported on the upcoming Behavioral Health Summit where Thomas McLellan, PhD – a national expert on linking physical and behavioral health services – will help local leaders develop objectives and activities for Gaston County to enhance and establish new treatment linkages for persons with opioid dependencies. The program, formerly described as the Mental Health Summit, will run from 8AM to noon, on June 20 or 21, 2017. Mr. Gross thanked CaroMont Health for contributing meeting rooms and catering.

### **Community Education & Prevention Committee.**

In Dr. Donigan's absence, Ms. Kenney:

- Reported the Coalition website is operating on the Gaston DHHS website and she is securing analytics on its use. Once the site is upgraded in several months with new content management software, she will move materials that now reside on a single page, to unique pages with tabs. The website is at [www.gastoncsc.org](http://www.gastoncsc.org) and [www.opioidsafegaston.org](http://www.opioidsafegaston.org). Dr. Taormina asked members to tell Ms. Kenney what content is missing and to submit content, particularly for consumers.
- Thanked Mr. Lawson for his three recent articles on opioids in the *Gaston Gazette*. She asked members with communications staff in their organizations to contact her so they can work together to use consistent messages in their public information and education programming.
- Stated the committee will ask prescribers to sign Safe Prescriber Pledges. When all prescribers in a practice sign the pledge, it will receive a framed document, for their waiting rooms, stating it supports safe prescribing; the document will feature the Gaston Controlled Substances Coalition logo.
- Reported the committee is working on a general brochure, for community use, that discusses the risks of opioid misuse and abuse, preventing opioid dependence, securing treatments for opioid dependence, and other issues. The completed text will be posted on our website.
- Noted the group will develop a Communications Plan, with a focus on social media (SOME). Once the website is upgraded, she will use SOME to promote community awareness and action, and will refer individuals to the website.
- Described the Operation Medicine Cabinet card at each person's chair that lists the sites where county residents can dispose of no-longer-needed medications. Ms. McIntosh will distribute cards to pharmacies and Ms. Kenney invited members to ask her for cards as she can print as many as needed.
- Reported Connie Cook from the CaroMont pharmacy, Officer Jonathan Marr from the Gaston County Police Department, and Mr. Gross met once to plan medicine drop-off and drug education events across the county. Mr. Neumann and Ms. Mathis asked to be included in future discussions. Gaston DHHS-Public Health is purchasing lockable drug vials for staff to distribute at the events.

It was noted that the cost of disposing needles and syringes is considerably greater than drugs as disposal rates are based on weight. Another option is to put needles and syringes in sealed and clear plastic bottles and dispose of them in standard trash. Dr. Taormina reported drug drop boxes will be installed at DHHS-Social Services and DHHS-Public Health on Hudson Boulevard.

### **Partner Activities**

#### **Data Dashboard**

Ms. Boafu made a PowerPoint presentation of data on opioid-related events in Gaston County: Emergency Department Visits for Opioids, Opioid Prescriptions, Use of the Controlled Substance

Reporting System, Opioid Deaths, Drug Trafficking in Unincorporated Areas, and Needle Exchange. Dr. Taormina shared new data on Unintentional Poisoning Deaths in Gaston County by for 2013, 2014, and 2015. This information is on the Coalition website and will be regularly updated.

### **CaroMont Medical Group (CMG)**

Dr. Andreou described how Tom Henry and Leann Ferris, in the CaroMont Pharmacy, enhanced the CMG electronic medical record to identify physicians who do not comply with CDC opioid-prescribing recommendations. The first data analysis, in December 2016, found 30% were compliant. Dr. Andreou visited these practices, spoke individually with prescribers, and showed them how to use this resource – which includes guidance on titrating opioid doses to wean patients from opioids. CaroMont will soon analyze the data to determine if more prescribers are following CDC standards.

CMG is also making more pain management referrals and using local anesthetic blocks to reduce pain and reduce the need for opioids. Dr. Andreou emphasized that using case studies is a strong approach for teaching prescribers how to improve their opioid management skills.

Dr. Davis stated it is important for the Coalition to meet as it recognizes the members' hard work and reinvigorates them. He stated a strategic CaroMont goal is to reduce the use of opioids. This meshes with their focus on standardizing patient care to reduce variability and achieve high reliability. He noted their system encourages and educates their prescribers to follow protocols developed by experts. He cited Dr. Andreou for his work with CMG practices.

He reported CaroMont is actively recruiting primary care physicians and psychiatrists and now embeds social workers in CMG practices to work with patients on a variety of issues, including opioid misuse and abuse. He pledged to continue providing resources in support of the Coalition's work.

Ms. McIntosh observed the interest in titrating opioids might be an attractive topic for the fall CME program. This would turn the focus from "Don't Do" to "Here's How" to help patients.

Dr. Andreou stated CaroMont requires all CMG providers to use the Controlled Substances Reporting System. The NC Medical Board will soon require all prescribers to show they have registered for this system to be relicensed. He also stated prescribers are designating their staff to use the system. Dr. Ocloo said Medical Office Assistants at GFHS check the NC and SC registries for patients who present at their three-month controlled substance visits.

**Drug Diversion and Treatment Program.** No report.

### **Clean Needle Exchange.**

Ms. Mathis reported, Olive Branch Ministry (OBM) distributed 4,400 clean syringes, collected more than 900 used syringes, and distributed 49 Naloxone kits to intravenous drug users and their family members in the first quarter of 2017. Their data does not describe unique encounters, as program clients are often anonymous. Following a *Gaston Gazette* article on their needle exchange program, she received phone calls and texts from residents of Mt. Holly, Belmont, and Gastonia who enrolled in the program. She also received positive community feedback, donated syringes, and is meeting with Ms. McIntosh to develop messaging to use with pharmacies and to enable individuals to show exchange participation cards so they will be able to purchase bags of syringes at pharmacies; they will soon be distributing cards on the needle exchange program in the Release Room at the Gaston County Jail.

Their biggest challenge is securing an adequate supply of syringes, as they cannot purchase them with public funds. OBM is working to collect unused syringes through Hospice of Gaston County, which can

gather home supplies from the families of clients who have died. They continue to look for syringe exchange volunteers and are now vetting peer-to-peer volunteers for the program.

Ms. Mathis stated the OBM website, now under construction, will include guidance on disposing used syringes. She asked Coalition members to call her if they have an abundance of syringe discards as she can dispose of them in Catawba County. She reported they use stick-proof gloves and biohazard containers to gather used syringes lying in public places. A good resource on protecting medications is [www.lockyourmeds.org](http://www.lockyourmeds.org).

### **Healthy Communities Program**

Ms. Earley stated that on July 1, all NC health departments will receive \$10,000 in state funds to develop and disseminate messages to prevent opioid abuse and misuse, and to promote the proper use of Naloxone. She is collaborating with nine other county health departments to make the most of their funds. For example, Buncombe County DHHS is conducting focus groups to test messages, including one suggested by an opioid-dependent client: "I'm closer than you think." They expect to disseminate the most effective messages through: Pandora, Facebook, Grindr, Tinder, Spotify, Internet advertising, I Heart radio, town newsletters, and Gaston DHHS may host a Grizzlies game. She asked Coalition members to send her other messages, topics to address, and slogans. Representatives from the participating counties will meet in June to further develop and refine their collaborative approach.

### **STAR Program**

Dr. Taormina reported data on the first year of the Substance Treatment And Rehabilitation Program (DHHS-Public Health) will describe the results of interventions with the 162 women in their Maternity Clinic, who tested positive for drugs. Preliminary findings show babies born with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome at the CaroMont BirthPlace was 26% less than in the previous 12 months.

STAR is doing well in four of its six program phases. Staff is working to increase the number of post-partum women participating in the program. STAR conducted a successful Lunch-n-Learn program with BirthPlace staff and the *Gaston Gazette* described the program, which is now beyond its capacity. Dr. Taormina will share the final data, when it is available in a few weeks.

### **Grant opportunity: Child Health Insurance Program**

Dr Taormina stated DHHS-Public Health staff is working on 29 of 32 recommendations in the STAR Implementation Plan. Programming is needed to provide childcare when mothers are in behavioral treatment, transportation for these women to secure medical, health, and recovery services, and housing and residential treatment services.

The State Department of Health included a budget request of \$500,000 for each of two years, in a request to the federal Health Resources and Services Administration to fund these activities. They also included a line item to support our county's syringe exchange program; Dr. Taormina asked all organizations to include funding for OBM programming in their grant applications.

### **Grant opportunity: Opioids and Women**

Dr Taormina described a proposal DHHS-Public Health submitted to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to retain a Coordinator for the Coalition to deliver primary and secondary prevention services to women in Gaston County. This funding would also benefit their children and male partners. The results of this proposal will be announced in two to three months.

### **Agency Spotlight: Partners Behavioral Health Management**

Ms. Hallisey provided an overview of Partners Behavioral Health Management (PHBM), the public agency that manages 250 public providers of mental health, substance abuse disorders, and

intellectual and developmental disabilities services in eight counties, including Gaston. PHBM is the former Pathways and Gaston-Lincoln Mental Health. In 2006 the state required Partners to divest itself as a direct service provider and to manage private providers of required services.

PHBM has an annual operating budget of \$250MM and serves a client base that is 85% Medicaid clients. Its efficiencies in care management are largely retained by the agency and pay for services used by uninsured individuals, and for innovative prevention, treatment, and intervention services – for example Olive Branch Ministries, which trained PHBM providers in the use of Naloxone; it is also paying for the first year of the Drug Diversion and Treatment Program (DDAT).

Ms. Donalley asked if PHBM was aware of new Medicaid funding for substance abuse treatment services. Ms. Hallisey was not aware of those resources. She described how children, in families where parents abuse substances, are put in foster care and their families lose their Medicaid benefits. With Foster Care 1150 Waivers, these parents can keep their Medicaid benefits for 12 months as they work to achieve sobriety and have their children return home. Ms. Donnelly with research the availability of Medicaid funding for substance abuse treatment services.

Ms. Hultgren volunteered to present the next Agency Spotlight on the HIV and Hepatitis C testing and treatment program managed by GFHS.

## **Other**

### **Directory of Coalition Members**

Mr. Gross will resend the link to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire, which the Coalition is using to develop a membership directory.

**Adjourn.** The meeting adjourned at 8:57 following a motion by Ms. Earley, a second by Ms. Mathis, and a unanimous vote of approval.

**Next Meeting:** June 16, 2017.