

Stronger Together

Butte County is making significant progress in preventing opioid misuse and treating opioid use disorder in the region.



Learn
about effective
treatment strategies,
alternative pain
management approaches
and easy-to-use
overdose reversal
medication!

Local medication drop-off locations are one of the many tools Butte County health care professionals, like Feather River Health Center, use to prevent opioid misuse and addiction.

PHOTO BY EMILY TEAGUE

Protecting Butte County

BY HOWARD HARDEE

Multiple organizations and agencies have banded together to help the region combat opioid misuse



Dr. Mark Lundberg has seen many success stories amongst his patients battling illnesses, but he wants to see more of this one in particular: A local Butte County man who had been abusing the opioid painkiller Norco — taking 25 pills a day — tapered off the medications entirely with the help of county resources.

“He’s a great dad and a great employee,” Lundberg said. “He’s healthy now, after being in the program for two or three years.”

Lundberg oversees the Butte County Behavioral Health Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Services program that offers medication-assisted treatment for low-income individuals who are addicted to opioids. He is just one of many tackling the local opioid problem head-on.

Indeed, it has been an all-hands-on-deck effort involving physicians, public health officials, nurses and first responders such as police officers and EMTs. Once one of the most opioid-saturated counties in California, Butte has made major strides in terms of how local doctors prescribe medications, treat overdoses and approach addiction prevention.

Dr. Phillip Filbrandt, who specializes in physical medicine and rehabilitation at his private practice in Chico, embraces the region’s shifted attitude wholeheartedly.

“When we began using opioid medications 30 years ago, the sky was the limit,” he said. “Pain was whatever the patient thought it was, and we treated it with as many opioids as necessary. At the time, that was thought to be a valid construct

for dealing with pain. Now we’re starting to understand that we were prescribing too much medication.”

Filbrandt is the chair leading the Butte-Glenn Medical Society Drug Abuse Prevention Task Force, a group that launched in 2014 to tackle the county’s high rate of opioid addictions and overdoses. Cutting down the supply of prescription painkillers has been a key aspect of the countywide strategy, he said, as has educating medical personnel about safe prescribing practices, alternatives to medication and proper disposal for unused medications.

“It’s about reserving opioids for severe pain and using them short-term,” he said.

Lundberg added that medical providers in Butte County are also embracing addiction treatments such as Suboxone, a drug that reduces cravings and symptoms of withdrawal.

“When you put people on Suboxone, they feel normal immediately. They don’t feel sick anymore, they don’t have cravings. They feel great,” Lundberg said.

Although relapse is common among those who struggle with addiction, Suboxone works as a stable first step toward getting and staying substance free.

Lundberg has seen firsthand how “life-changing” Suboxone treatment has been for many of his patients who were once impacted by opioid addiction.

Lundberg said that integrating innovative drugs like Suboxone into patient care has been “one of the most rewarding things” he’s done in health care.

“We were prescribing too much medication.”

DR. PHILLIP FILBRANDT
Butte County psychiatrist

FACTS AND FIGURES

Organizations and agencies in Butte County are working together to combat opioid misuse. Here’s a look at what opioid misuse looks like in the region:



Over 23% decrease in the number of prescriptions written per 1,000 people from 2013 to 2017 in Butte County.



264,514 Opioid prescriptions written in Butte County in 2017.



17 people died in Butte County in 2017 from an opioid overdose.



104 hospitalizations occurred in Butte County related to opioids.

Source: California Opioid Overdose Surveillance Dashboard

Understanding Pain

BY HOWARD HARDEE

Opioids can be helpful, but there are usually better options for patients

Pain can be debilitating. Dr. Brandan Stark has a patient who suffers from chronic headaches — he’s seen physical medicine and rehabilitation doctors, neurologists, headache specialists and tried almost every kind of medication imaginable, but nothing works except opioid-based pain relievers. Stark said this type of patient is one of the few who actually benefit from using opioids responsibly.

“Opioids allow him to get out of bed and sleep through the night without pain,” Stark said. “I don’t think his medication should be tapered. He needs to be on the lowest dose that allows him to function.”

As a family medicine doctor with Argyll Medical Group in Chico, Stark doesn’t only treat pain, he also treats addiction. He is a designated provider of Suboxone, a narcotic opioid replacement medication that blocks severe cravings and withdrawals. While he recognizes that opioids can be a useful tool, he believes they should be used sparingly.

“I think every medication has a place,” he said. “Opioids have a risk-benefit ratio, but for some people with chronic medical problems who aren’t functional because of their pain, they can increase quality of life.”

However, for most other patients, opioids are too risky and aren’t even the best long-term treatment plan. There are a number of non-narcotic drugs that doctors can prescribe as alternatives to opioids and can be more effective at managing,

Stark said. These alternatives range from simple Tylenol and Motrin to medications that specifically target nerve pain. There are also pain-reduction strategies that don’t involve drugs at all and may facilitate better healing, such as physical therapy, sleep improvements, weight control, acupuncture, meditation and mindfulness training. For most people without intense, chronic pain, these may be better options.

“We have lots of ways to attack the pain mechanisms in the brain,” he said.

This is why Stark is one of many doctors in Butte County embracing the new paradigm that “less is more” when it comes to prescribing narcotic painkillers — because drugs like oxycodone, hydrocodone, codeine and



Most patients could benefit from other pain management methods over an opioid prescription — that’s why Dr. Brandan Stark only prescribes opioids to those who truly need them.

PHOTO BY EMILY TEAGUE

morphine come with a high risk of addiction and a host of physical, mental and emotional side-effects with hardly any long-term benefits.

“Addiction shuts down your frontal cortex — the decision-making part of your brain — so you really don’t think clearly,” he said. “It’s a literal change in brain function. You’re making poor decisions because that part of your brain isn’t really working right.”

Stark believes in treating the whole patient, not just the symptoms of addiction. Most of the people Stark treats for opioid-related disorders have a strong family history of addiction, which suggests that there is a genetic component. Like most care providers in Butte County, Stark approaches his treatment for people who have developed substance use disorders with compassion, “just like people with diabetes or heart disease.”

“We have lots of ways to attack pain mechanisms in the brain.”

DR. BRANDAN STARK
Butte County family medicine physician

REDUCING HARM

In addition to changing prescribing habits and instituting prevention programs, there are other ways communities can combat substance misuse and addiction. One way is through harm reduction programs that support affected communities through promotion of any positive change in a person’s life.

Andrew Woodruff, Director of Plumas County Public Health Agency, realized when he moved to Quincy, Calif. in the winter of 2015 that a comprehensive harm reduction program was needed to prevent new opioid addictions and reduce overdoses in the county.

“We didn’t have access to the overdose-reversing medication Naloxone, no syringe access or disposal and no access to medication-assisted treatment (MAT),” he said.

In response, the county created new programs that accept drug use as a reality and aim to minimize its effects through a spectrum of prevention and treatment services that start with an emphasis on increased access to life saving tools like Narcan and clean needles, as well as MAT. Since being implemented, overdose death rates have plummeted.

These successes are shared by the Northern

Sierra Opioid Safety Coalition partner counties which include Modoc, Lassen and Sierra counties — showing harm reduction can be successful anywhere, especially rural areas.

The Butte-Glenn Medical Society Drug Abuse Prevention Task Force is part of the California Opioid Safety Network and will be pursuing additional harm reduction programs in the region.

Butte County has changed the way it approaches drug misuse and addiction, including practices followed in emergency departments by doctors like James Moore and by police like Chief Michael O'Brien.

PHOTO BY EMILY TEAGUE

The Right Response

BY HOWARD HARDEE

New training and prescription guidelines assist health and law enforcement services in responding to opioid misuse and overdose



As an emergency physician at Enloe Medical Center, Dr. James Moore can see that Butte County is getting a grip on the opioid epidemic. Change takes time, however, and some medications like oxycodone and hydrocodone are still being prescribed more than they should be.

"Of the people I see in the emergency room, why do half of them have Norco on their medication list? Why is everybody on Norco? Once you start noticing that, you realize that opioids are so prevalent," he said.

To limit opioid use, physicians are following a new set of rules: Only prescribe opioids to those who truly need them, don't prescribe more than 20 pills at a time, avoid the highest-strength opioids, and only allow refills once every 30 days. Moore said the same is true in emergency departments.

"We're trying to be clear about the guidelines, so when a patient comes in and requests medication, we have something to point to," Moore said. "Now patients know why they're not getting these medications. That's helped a lot, to get the community to buy in, even if they don't like it individually."

Enloe has also partnered with community physicians and adopted resources from the California Bridge Program to help patients receive longer-term treatment for opioid-related disorders. For example, emergency department physicians can transition patients to medications, such as buprenorphine (Suboxone), that curb their opioid dependence, and then refer them to physician offices in the community to help continue rehabilitation and management of their medications.

Chico police are also adopting new strategies. Chief Michael O'Brien said that, as first responders, all of his officers are prepared to handle overdose emergencies thanks to training from Butte County Public Health. Now, the Chico Police Department is the first agency in the county to carry Naloxone, which is used to treat narcotic overdoses. Previously, similar antidotes to Naloxone were available but not user-friendly and not always carried by first responders.

"There was the injection-type device, but that was not safe," he said. "Naloxone utilizes a nasal spray delivery. It is almost 100% safe. That made it an easy decision."

Since Chico police started carrying Naloxone, they have used it successfully when responding to overdose calls. The most unforgettable instance was a mass overdose in January of 2019. Twelve people were hospitalized for taking the synthetic opioid fentanyl, and one person passed away at the scene. Several young people, most in their 20s, were involved in the event.

"It was a crazy scene," O'Brien said.

"A dozen people overdosed that day — that's how powerful that substance is. That should give everyone pause, because it doesn't take much to cause devastating effects."

Thanks to police training, officers were able to administer Naloxone at the scene, saving many lives that otherwise could have been lost.

"We're trying to be clear about the guidelines."

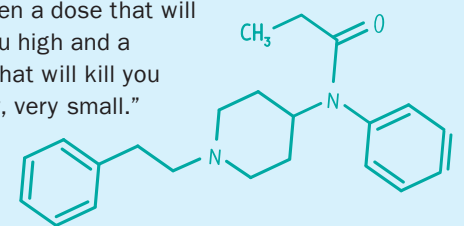
DR. JAMES MOORE
*Emergency department physician,
Enloe Medical Center*

WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that was originally developed as an anesthetic. Doctors eventually realized it was also effective at relieving pain in small quantities and started prescribing it for that purpose, but there's an extremely small margin of error with fentanyl — it can be as much as 100 times more powerful than morphine, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Though fentanyl is generally safe when administered by trained professionals, the fentanyl sold on the street or integrated into other drugs is usually made outside of a pharmaceutical setting. Clandestine labs might not deliver a product of consistent and safe potency, which is critical because a 3-milligram dose of fentanyl is enough to kill an average-sized adult male.

"You're not buying these drugs from a pharmacist," said Chico Police Chief Michael O'Brien. "You're relying upon these dealers not to have cut their heroin with fentanyl to make it more potent. And the difference between a dose that will get you high and a dose that will kill you is very, very small."



Face the Risk

BY MATT JOCKS

High school program helps student realize the dangers of opioid misuse and who is at risk

The first thing Alyssa Merrill came to know about drug misuse was how little she knew, and what danger that placed her in.

"I wasn't very exposed to it," she said. "When you're ignorant, you're at real risk."

A junior and member of the competitive cheer team at Pleasant Valley High School in Chico, Alyssa now knows what to look for so she can avoid abusive tendencies herself and recognize them in others. That's because Alyssa participates in Athlete Committed of Butte County Behavioral Health Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Services, a program that steers students away from drug and alcohol use. Alyssa uses what she's learned to spread the word about the negative impacts of alcohol and drugs on athletic performance.

Johnny Kovacs, a former wrestler at Chico High School, also went through



"When you're ignorant, you're at real risk."

ALYSSA MERRILL
Junior, Pleasant Valley
High School

the program. Since graduation, he has become a paid youth staff member of Athlete Committed and continues his work with the program. Johnny said the bigger message of Athlete Committed meant the most to him: Be aware of the actions of yourself and your friends.

"One of the messages of the program that really stuck with me," he said, "was when they asked, 'Who are your five best friends? Those are the people you are going to become.'"

Even if they're aware of opioid misuse, most young people in Butte County don't realize how easy it is to get addicted themselves.

"In high school, drinking or drugs can almost be a social expectation," said Alyssa. "When you join Athlete Committed and learn about everything in the program, it sets a new expectation."

Young athletes are especially at risk because sports-related injuries and surgeries may lead to prescriptions for painkillers.

"You don't realize you're becoming addicted," Johnny said. "Maybe you were on the right path. But now you are using these, and you're dealing with the emotions of potentially losing your athletic career. Addiction leads you down a terrible path that you never saw yourself going down."

Alyssa agreed: In Athlete Committed, she learned addiction can happen quickly.

"You can get addicted in three to five days," Alyssa said. "And it's not just injuries that may lead to you having painkillers. It can be something like getting your wisdom teeth out. That's a big thing at this age."

Johnny and Alyssa both said that the best prevention to addiction is education.

"Every time Athlete Committed is invited to a new place, we go into that community and we see it work. Every time," Johnny said.

"Addiction leads you down a terrible path that you never saw yourself going down."

JOHNNY KOVACS
Alumnus, Chico
High School



PHOTOS BY EMILY TEAGUE

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

For people who are struggling with addiction themselves or know someone else who is, there are places to turn. Here is where to find help in Butte County:



Aegis Treatment Centers, LLC

590 Rio Lindo Ave., Chico
530-345-3491

Argyll Medical Group

Contact: Brandan Stark
100 Independence Circle, Chico
530-899-0295

Butte County Behavioral Health Substance Use Treatment & Recovery Services

Chico: 560 Cohasset Rd. Ste. 175
530-879-3950
Oroville: 2430 Bird St.
530-538-7277

Butte County Behavioral Health Stepping Stones Perinatal and Parenting Women Program

Chico: 109 Parmac Rd., Ste. 2
530-879-3363
Oroville: 2167 Montgomery St. Ste. C
530-538-4359

Elijah House

Contact: Joe Henderson
1256 Bird St., Oroville
530-679-0531

Groups: Recover Together

1550 Humboldt Rd. Ste. 3, Chico
530-341-2866

Mangrove Medical Group

1040 Mangrove Ave., Chico
530-354-0064

Oroville Hospital Pain Clinic

2767 Olive Highway, Oroville
530-533-8500

Skyway House, Chico

Contact: David Deichler
3105 Esplanade, Chico
530-898-8326

Therapeutic Solutions

3247 Esplanade, Chico
530-883-8535

BUTTE COUNTY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PREVENTION PROGRAMS

ATHLETE **COMMITTED** LIVE A LIFE OF EXCELLENCE

Provides support and education to athletes, coaches and parents on critical topics — such as substance misuse, stress, sleep, nutrition, training, recovery and character — and relates these issues to athletic performance and life in general.

PARENT **COMMITTED** TO STOPPING UNDERAGE DRINKING

Educates parents and caregivers on how to safely monitor and store alcohol in their home, set no-use expectations, and have conversations with their children about underage drinking and other issues they may be facing.

PHYSICIAN **COMMITTED** TO SCREENING AND EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF HEALTH ISSUES

Provides a tool kit with screening information and a protocol for medical professionals to use when interacting with teens through sports physicals, regular visits, or emergency room and acute care visits.

Impact Mentoring

The Impact Mentoring Program is a cross-age mentor program that matches thriving high school leaders with middle school proteges for a supervised weekly mentoring experience. The mentors support students with setting and achieving realistic goals, building healthy relationships, learning effective communication skills, understanding the harmful effects of substance use, and promoting positive mental and emotional health and well-being.



For more information on prevention programs in Butte County, visit www.butteyouthnow.org.

Coaches on a Mission

BY MATT JOCKS

Athlete Committed coaches are helping athletes reach their full potential

If you are willing to be up at 6 a.m., running and training to make yourself the best athlete you can be, why would you waste that work by taking drugs or getting drunk at a party that night?

That is the kind of direct message given to student athletes at Pleasant Valley High School and Chico High School as part of Athlete Committed, a comprehensive program to inform students about the impact of alcohol and drug use on physical performance.

The program's coordinators know drugs and alcohol play no part in competitive success. Pleasant Valley football coach Mark Cooley is coming off his second state championship season, and Chico's Keith Rollins has guided his wrestling squad to 10 division titles. Both also know that the time athletes spend out of their sight can be just as important as their practice time.

"We're not getting the same type of athletes we were 10 years ago," Rollins said. "The kids who are playing, generally, are not partying. The kids who want to party are choosing not to play. We may be missing out on some good athletes, but the payoff is so much higher."

Athlete Committed conveys information, not only about drugs and alcohol, but also on lifestyle issues such as sleep, nutrition and maintaining a positive frame of mind.

Athletes are required to attend at least one of the three code night presentations, which reiterate the Athlete Code of Conduct and how to successfully uphold it. These events are held before the fall, winter and spring sports season. There are also weekly lunchtime

"The kids who are playing, generally, are not partying."

KEITH ROLLINS
Wrestling coach, Chico High School



meetings and special events such as capture the flag or movie nights at the Pleasant Valley football stadium.

The program also requires athletes to sign contracts stating that students will avoid drug and alcohol use, and lays out the disciplinary steps and paths to restoration in the program in the case of violations.

Both coaches have seen opioid misuse in their communities, and addressing the risk for misuse or addiction is part of Athlete Committed. Coordinators want to make sure athletes are aware of these risks in case they are prescribed opioids due to an injury.

"It becomes about pain management,"

Cooley said. "The body is so regenerative. My kid had two ACL knee surgeries, and he was off the pain meds in a day. He just said, 'I don't want it.'"

While both coaches acknowledge there has been a change in the culture of athletics, Rollins said he would like to expand it to the general student population.

"We have about 2,000 kids in the school, and about one-third of those students play a sport and participate in Athlete Committed," he said.

"The body is so regenerative."

MARK COOLEY
Football coach, Pleasant Valley High School



PHOTOS BY EMILY TEAGUE

Strategies for Combating Opioid Addiction

BY MATT JOCKS

Understanding Butte County's treatment system

Efforts to combat opioid addiction have come a long way in Butte County, but there is plenty more ground to cover. Judson Lea, northern regional manager for Aegis Treatment Center and coordinator of the regional Hub & Spoke treatment system, spoke about where the battle is and where it's going.

How is the region approaching the opioid epidemic?

With a multi-pronged, multi-tool approach. For those diagnosed with opioid use disorder (OUD), our goal is to improve access to medication-assisted treatment, especially in rural areas. We also work alongside behavioral health providers. We have a hub and seven active spokes in the Chico Hub & Spoke System Grant providing medication and counseling to over 1,000 patients.

Why should behavioral health be a component?

I think it's critical. Medication is good. Medication combined with counseling is much better. The combination can reduce overdoses by up to 50 percent.

What should people know about addiction?

People often see the use of opioid as a choice, that people can choose to quit as long as they have the willpower. Research shows us that it is a chronically relapsing brain condition. A very small percentage will be able to use just counseling and an abstinence-based approach to get to recovery. Most will need medication-based treatment.

How do people end up addicted?

You have opioid receptors in your brain. You break your leg and the doctor prescribes pain medication and it floods those sites.

For those who become addicted, it creates additional binding sites. If those are not filled, it creates withdrawal, which will feel like the worst flu you've ever had.

What risks should young people be aware of?

We have seen people exposed and then beginning to use opioids as young as 9, 10 or 11 years old, often because family members are using it. When kids go to parties, they have access to pills and they don't know exactly what they are. They can become addicted in as little as five days. It's something that can rapidly change their life, or even end their life. That's why it's so important for adults to make sure their prescription medications are locked up to prevent children from accessing them.

How important is Naloxone?

Naloxone is a critical lifesaving rescue drug. Butte County Public Health was able to get it to law enforcement and firefighters early on. You look at the number of overdoses and it would be significantly higher without so many first responders having access to Naloxone.



JUDSON LEA
Northern regional
manager, Aegis
Treatment Center

Who should be carrying it?

Everybody. I carry it in my car because I might go into a McDonald's bathroom and there might be someone overdosing. Certainly any place where it's free for people to hang out, such as libraries, colleges, schools.

Where can the public get Naloxone?

It can be given with a prescription, but now most pharmacies have it available without a prescription. The Public Health Department has access to kits, and there are grants to give organizations access to larger amounts.

What's next for Butte County?

It's important to get people directly into treatment from access points, and two of the most critical ones are emergency rooms and jails. In ERs, we see people who may have overdosed. We also see people who are seeking pain medication and may have even injured themselves to get it. Withdrawal is so bad that people will do that. Many who get incarcerated struggle with OUD. Some are already on medication for it, and that needs to be continued. We need to look at those who can be diagnosed with OUD and are in withdrawal and start them on life-saving medication-assisted treatment.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

Look for these common signs

1. UNCONSCIOUS

The person won't wake up, even if you shake them or say their name

2. BREATH

Breathing slows or even stops

3. LIPS AND NAILS

Lips and fingernails turn blue or gray

4. SKIN

Skin gets pale and clammy

If you think someone is overdosing, call for help immediately, put the person on their side and administer Naloxone.

HOW TO ADMINISTER NALOXONE

Get free Naloxone at Northern Valley Harm Reduction Coalition, nvhrc.com

Using Naloxone is an easy process. Having Naloxone on you and knowing how to use it could save a life! Here's how to administer it and reverse an overdose once you get your own supply:

1. PEEL

Peel back the package to remove the device. Hold with your thumb on the bottom of the plunger and two fingers on the nozzle.

2. PLACE

Gently place the nozzle in either nostril far enough that your fingers touch the bottom of the patient's nose.

3. PRESS

Press the plunger to release the dose. Remove the nozzle from the nostril after giving the dose.

4. CALL

Call for emergency medical help. Move the person on their side and watch them closely. Give another dose if person does not respond to voice or touch, or is not breathing normally.



Dispose Responsibly!



Statewide legislation mandating take-back locations of medications and medical sharps won't go into effect until 2021, but there are already locations in Butte County that offer take-back services. Currently, these places offer take-back programs as a community service. Take a look to find out where you can dispose of your medications or sharps in an easy-to-use take-back bin!

MEDICATION TAKE-BACK LOCATIONS

Feather River Health Center
5125 Skyway Rd., Paradise
Located in pharmacy

Orchard Hospital
240 Spruce St., Gridley
Located in lobby

Oroville Police Department
2055 Lincoln Blvd., Oroville

Walgreens
860 East Ave., Chico
Located in pharmacy

SHARPS TAKE-BACK LOCATIONS

Butte County Public Health Clinic
695 Oleander Ave., Chico
Inside lobby

Butte County Public Health Clinic
78 Table Mountain Blvd., Oroville
Inside lobby

Butte Regional HHW Facility
1101 Marauder St., Chico
At the HHW facility

Feather River Health Center
5125 Skyway Rd., Paradise
Located to the right of the front doors

Feather River Senior Center
1335 Meyers St., Oroville
Inside, regular hours only

Neal Road Recycling & Waste Facility

1023 Neal Rd., Paradise
Inside electronic waste area

North Valley Indian Health Clinic
845 East Ave., Chico
Inside lobby

Orchard Hospital
240 Spruce St., Gridley
Located at the front of the hospital

Oroville Police Department
2055 Lincoln Blvd., Oroville

Recology of Butte Colusa Counties
2720 S. Fifth Ave., Oroville
Outside in front of HHW facility

Torres Shelter
101 Silver Dollar Way, Chico
Left side of driveway

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



25 Jan Court, Ste. 130
Chico, CA 95928
530-342-4296



560 Cohasset Rd., Ste. 175
Chico, CA 95926
530-891-2784



590 Rio Lindo Ave.
Chico, CA 95926
530-345-3491



530-891-2891