Prince, Pastors & the Prescription Drug Epidemic

Last week, I had the opportunity to present to District Superintendents at the United Methodist Church’s Joint Cabinet Meeting, held here at the James B. Hunt, Jr. Library on NC State's Centennial Campus. The information I shared with these pastors from across the state concerned a topic of increasing importance in communities across North Carolina: the prevalence of opiate abuse and its connections to mental illness. At the convening, I offered pastors possible solutions to help alleviate this epidemic in their communities. The presentation was met with gratitude and enlightening conversation, and I was struck by the idea that other community leaders throughout the state – including many of our newsletter subscribers – could benefit from this valuable information.

The Rise of Opioid and Prescription Drug Abuse

How Can You Help?

I’d like to share some of the insight I provided to the rural pastors last week. These problems affect communities all across North Carolina, and these suggestions are appropriate not just for churches but for all community leaders.
First, churches and community leaders must understand the signs of opiates and prescription drug abuse. Then, they must understand how these drugs can affect families and their community. Lastly, they must know what they can do to help.

Churches are a vital asset in establishing strong community ties across North Carolina, especially in rural populations. Working with church organizations like the UMC is critical in making progress towards healthier communities. Learn more about IEI’s Thriving Rural Communities initiative.

Resources:
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255
- The CDC will host a seven-part webinar series about opioid prescriptions, beginning June 22 at 2:00 p.m. It is open to the public. More info here.

Featured Program: IEI’s Summer in the Commons Youth Engagement Program

On April 21, Grammy-winning icon Prince died at age 57. Earlier this month, his autopsy confirmed the singer-songwriter’s death was caused by opioid overdose. Prince was one of the 2.5 million Americans from across all demographics who struggle with addiction to opiates, a class of drugs used to relieve pain and are legal when prescribed by physicians but illegal if misused or abused. Common opioids include oxytocin, hydrocodone, morphine, and codeine.

This problem hits close to home. According to a recent report by Castlight Health, a health information company out of San Francisco, Wilmington is the number one opioid-abusing city in the nation; three other NC cities - Hickory, Jacksonville and Fayetteville - cracked the top 25.

Across the State, Poisoning Deaths Rise

The Medical Free Dictionary’s definition of poisoning: “Poisoning occurs when any substance interferes with normal body functions after it is swallowed, inhaled, injected, or absorbed.”

Infographic made with Piktochart

Cheaper than a 6-pack of Beer

Opiates have been around for centuries, so what accounts for the recent meteoric rise in opiate-related deaths? Today, opioids and prescription drugs are more available and more affordable than ever. Since the turn of the century, researchers have found that opioid prescriptions have nearly quadrupled, as has the number of deaths from prescription drug abuse. As any high school health class can tell you, addiction to one
Looking for an engaging activity for your K-12 students this summer? Schedule your Summer in the Commons tour today! For more information, contact Simone Collman.

Help Youth Get FutureWork-Ready This Summer!

Too many North Carolina students are making career decisions with no understanding of trends shaping the future of work. Help IEI make a difference for 20,000+ youth during the next 10 weeks—donate today!

FutureWork Prosperity Tour Next Stop: North Central Region!
Next Steps

For now, the public needs to take steps in recognizing the potential connection between mental health and drug use. Improving our treatment and diagnosis of mental illness may help to alleviate the need for some people to abuse drugs. If you know of someone who may be battling drug abuse, you can support them by suggesting they seek professional help. Signs of heroin use may include wearing long sleeves to hide injection scars, being withdrawn from family and friends, worsened grades in school or lowered work performance, and weight loss.

Reach out to your community members to address these issues before they find a similar fate to the thousands who are dying from drug use. Our communities must use the resources already in place to encourage community members to turn to each other, not to opiates.

As we move forward as a state, we must remember the impact that opioids and prescription drugs have on our communities. It is also important to recognize and help those suffering from mental illness. Looking to the future, active communities and innovative solutions will be essential in establishing the physical and mental wellbeing of North Carolina.