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Rushford, Meriden earn \$2M in federal funds for opioid referral program

MERIDEN– Noting annual increases in the number of residents dying from opioid overdoses, the City of Meriden partnered with Hartford HealthCare to create a program designed to combat the problem.

Fueled by a four-year, \$2-million federal grant from the Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the Meriden Opioid Referral for Recovery (MORR) program bridge the gap that exists between the delivery of Narcan™ by first responders to reverse opioid overdoses and valuable follow-up assessment and treatment that can yield long-term recovery.

“It’s important that people with opioid use disorder (OUD) be given options once the Narcan saves them from death by overdose. Through MORR, Meriden’s first responders can seamlessly connect people with the services of Hartford HealthCare’s Rushford Crisis Team,” said Dr. J. Craig Allen, medical director of Rushford. “That provides direct access to a clinician who can assess the client’s physical and emotional condition and make appropriate referrals for treatment.”

MORR expands the programs Rushford and Hartford HealthCare already offer in the area, including the presence of recovery coaches in the emergency department at MidState Medical Center. Rushford has also hired a team of skilled professionals to work with individuals referred through MORR. These include peer support specialists who play an integral part in supporting people in recovery and their families.

“When someone with opioid use disorder (OUD) arrives in our emergency department, they are approached by a peer recovery coach, someone who has been in their shoes and knows the struggles of addiction,” Dr. Allen said. “We know that peer-to-peer approach works, but we need to make that connection. Someone with OUD who overdoses in the field deserves the same opportunity for recovery.”

Meriden officials noticed an upward trend in the amount of Narcan being administered by city first responders in the past few years, but envisioned an opportunity to impact lives beyond the reversal of an overdose.

“We hope that the people recover instead of being given another dose of Narcan by our emergency personnel the next time they overdose,” said Timothy Coon, Meriden city manager. “The MORR project will help the city create a replicable model that will streamline processes between first responders who are reversing overdoses to prevent death and clinical and peer supports that will help people with OUD recover.”

The city will use MORR grant monies to purchase up to 400 doses of Narcan in each of the grant’s four years, saving excess for future use. In addition, Meriden – the Police, Fire, School, Health and Human Services departments- will collaborate with Rushford and the community-based Hunter’s Ambulance on educational programs outlining the dangers of OUD and overdoses for local healthcare providers while providing them with materials on treatment and recovery for their patients and families.

“The purpose of the MORR project is to streamline the path to recovery for people with OUD,” said Jessica Matyka, LCSW, director of crisis services and community programs with Rushford.

Lea Crown, director of Health and Human Services for Meriden, agreed, saying, “We know that treatment is effective and recovery is real, and the City of Meriden is committed to identifying a path that lets residents with OUD reclaim their lives and rejoin our community.”

Rushford offers a Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home (MATCH) program for treatment of addiction to drugs or alcohol. For more information, go to www.hhcbehavioralhealth.org/MATCH.

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