For Immediate Release

Mon County QRT model receives national attention; will mentor new group

MORGANTOWN, WV (Feb. 26, 2020) — Now that members of the Monongalia County Quick Response Team (QRT) have been meeting for nearly a year to address the area’s opioid addiction and overdose problem, they will serve as mentors to a new group forming in Richmond, Kentucky.

Employees from the Madison County Health Department will attend the weekly QRT meeting on Friday, March 6. They also will meet with individual agencies that participate in the group and go on some ride-alongs with first responders who treat overdose patients and peer recovery coaches (PRCs) who try to connect them with treatment.

“We’re inviting them here and showing them how our QRT operates,” said Brittany Irick, QRT coordinator and grant manager for Monongalia County Health Department. “They’ll attend our weekly meeting and learn about our data collection and about the epidemiology side of the work.”

The QRT is comprised of Monongalia County Health Department employees, fire, EMS, law enforcement and peer recovery coaches who have been meeting weekly since May. Contributions have been made by infectious disease physicians, faith leaders, a local pharmacist and other community members.

Monongalia County Health Department was one of five counties in West Virginia to be awarded a QRT grant from the state Department of Health and Human Resources, Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health. The grant was for $230,000.

Additional grants written by Irick, including the one that set up the mentor-mentee relationship, have been awarded since then. This $50,000 grant, called the Overdose Prevention and Response Mentorship Program, comes from the National Association of
County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), of which Monongalia County Health Department is a member.

The grant started in January and will last for six months. The two health departments were matched based on what Monongalia County Health Department and what Madison County Health Department listed as a need: coordinator of local substance misuse efforts.

“We’re going to help them identify potential stakeholders and how to build stakeholder support,” Irick said.

Training on how to administer and distribute naloxone, which reverses the effects of an opioid agenda, also will be on the agenda.

Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD’s executive director and county health officer, decided it was time for the QRT to teach another team the knowledge it has gained in the past year.

“Dr. Smith thought it would be a really good opportunity for us to highlight what our QRT is doing and also help another health department or initiative that is looking to start a similar project,” Irick said.

According to statistics Madison County health officials used on their grant application, the county is tied for first among Kentucky’s 120 counties in overdose deaths; 45% of the county’s syringe services program have experienced an overdose. Also, of the 378 overdose visits at local emergency departments in 2018, 337 involved opioids.

And last November, Madison County surpassed the number of the previous year’s opioid-related deaths. There were 46 in 2018; the county was already at 47 in November 2019.

The plan will be to teach Madison County health officials about how the Monongalia County QRT works: First responders submit overdose reports to a Dropbox account that is compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996.

PRCs, who have lived experienced with addiction, use those reports to try to track down individuals who have overdosed to connect them to treatment and services.

“Knowing that Madison County, Kentucky, will soon have its own peer recovery coaches engaging people in their community is one of the most amazing payoffs to working with the Monongalia County QRT,” said Jon Dower, director of operations for West Virginia Sober Living, the umbrella organization for West Virginia PEERS and other projects.

West Virginia PEERS has been contracted to serve as the PRCs on the Monongalia County QRT.
“Giving back to our communities is a core value of West Virginia Sober Living and many individuals in recovery,” Dower added. “We understand that we are currently facing the greatest public health crisis of our generation, with rampant misuse of substances. We also understand that solutions to these problems require a collaborative approach.”

Of the 139 clients that have been contacted since the QRT started last spring, 37% have been referred or connected with treatment of harm reduction services.

“I am proud of what Monongalia County Health Department is doing with our QRT, and also thrilled that individuals in recovery from substance use disorders are part of the solution,” Dower said. “I think our coaches instill hope that recovery is possible.”

Media is invited to attend the March 6 QRT meeting and cover this new relationship as it begins. It also would be possible to coordinate an interview during activities later in the day. Please contact Mary Wade Triplett at 304-598-5152 or at MaryWade.Triplett@wv.gov to set up a visit.

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