

How Do We Effectively Tackle the Opioid Epidemic?

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How Do We Effectively Tackle the Opioid Epidemic?

One Washington State Community Health Center's Approach

Sea Mar Community Health Centers is one of the largest and most diverse Federally Qualified Health Centers in the state of Washington. Sea Mar has 34 medical clinics, 36 behavioral health clinics, and 26 dental sites located throughout western Washington. In addition, Sea Mar has two adult and two youth inpatient treatment programs for substance use disorders (SUD). As a result of size and geographic reach, we have a very important opportunity to make an impact on the growing opioid epidemic. Below we will discuss some of our recent efforts, focused on both training and programmatic developments we have piloted in recent months.

Dr. Don Teater, Martha Teater and Chris Watras visiting Sea Mar Community Care Center in South Park, Seattle

Last month Sea Mar held its first ever training series taking a comprehensive look at opioids. This three-day training event was part of Sea Mar's effort to effectively train its providers on Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder (OUD), as well as change the culture around how the treatment of acute and chronic pain is viewed. Dr. Don Teater and Martha Teater of Teater Health Solutions (THS) led the training series. Dr. Teater is a family physician who worked as Medical Advisor at the National Safety Council between 2013-2015, addressing the national epidemic of opioid use, addiction, and overdose. Dr. Teater was lead facilitator for the expert panel discussion during the development of the 2016 CDC Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain. Martha Teater is a licensed clinical addictions specialist, licensed professional counselor, and licensed marriage and family therapist. Martha has done trainings all over the U.S. and internationally on varying topics including behavioral treatments of chronic pain. Don and Martha recently co-authored their workbook: *Treating Chronic Pain: Pill Free Approaches to Move People from Hurt to Hope*.



When developing this training, Sea Mar envisioned a program that would look at the full scope of ways patients are touched by opioids. Day one of the training focused primarily on understanding acute and chronic pain with a particular focus on

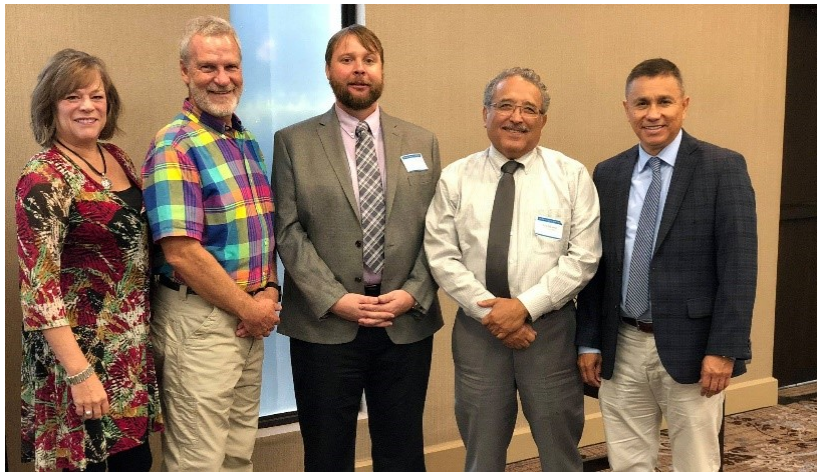
opioid pain medication alternatives. Sea Mar opened this training to medical providers, nurse managers, dentists, clinical supervisors, clinic managers, and MAT clinical staff. THS focused on the scientific evidence that opioids are one of the least effective treatments for both acute and chronic pain. They discussed chronic opioid therapy (COT) in the setting of the neurologic changes of central sensitization on the brain. THS also highlighted the use of behavioral interventions including cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) as one of the most effective treatments for chronic pain and central sensitization. The afternoon focused on working with more challenging behaviors that might present with patients on COT, including screening and identifying OUD with referral to MAT. This included a session on motivational interviewing with the stages of change and how providers can navigate difficult conversations with patients in the primary care setting.



Left to right: Martha Teater, M.A. Don Teater MD, Sea Mar Bellingham Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor Chris Watras LICSW, CPD,MAC,ICCS, Sea Mar Bellingham Medical Physician Christine Hancock MD, Sea Mar Tacoma Medical Director and Physician Megah Rao MPH, MD, Sea Mar Seattle Medical Physician Pat Gemperline MD

Day two of the training series focused primarily on evidence-based MAT for OUD, targeting its prescribing providers and chemical dependency professionals (CDPs). The morning reviewed the scientific evidence behind medications such as buprenorphine/naloxone to effectively treat OUD. THS presented how the brain is impacted by addiction with a particular emphasis on the specific effects of OUD. Dr. Teater presented the science demonstrating what he continued to reiterate throughout the day; that is, “opioid use disorder is one of the hardest substance use disorders to treat without medication, but one of the easiest to treat with medication.”

Training on day three targeted Sea Mar’s mental health clinicians, clinical supervisors, and integrated mental health therapists (IMHTs) that are co-located within the medical clinics. Martha Teater led the entire day’s training on behavioral interventions to treat chronic pain. This dovetailed nicely with the topics shared on day one around central sensitization and the processes that are happening in the brain for many of those that suffer from chronic pain. THS continued to explain that central sensitization is not an imagined pain or a mental health condition. Rather, it is a neurological process that has gone wrong in which patients truly experience pain very similar to what we see with patients with pain from phantom limbs. THS demonstrated the research supporting improved functioning and management of pain with COT patients who participate in behavioral interventions in tandem with primary care as compared to those that are prescribed opioids who typically have a decreased quality of life, and functioning, and continued pain issues.



Left to right: Martha Teater, Don Teater, Chris Watras (Sea Mar Bellingham Behavioral Health Clinical Supervisor, Dr. Alex Narvaez (Sea Mar Chief Dental Officer), and Dr. Ricardo Jimenez (Sea Mar Chief Medical Officer)

To make the training available to all relevant staff and providers, Sea Mar hired a film company to record the entire training series. This will also be a useful tool for new hired staff in understanding Sea Mar's philosophy and cultural shift for how pain is treated, as well as knowledge around best practices for the treatment of OUD. Part of this film series also included a short video created by THS, directed to support staff such as front receptionists that may come into frequent contact with these individuals. The purpose was to give them a better understanding of the issues that patients with chronic pain and OUD struggle with, as well as skills to manage some of the behavioral issues that might present during treatment.

This training series is one of many efforts under way at Sea Mar to address the opioid epidemic. In October of 2017, Sea Mar opened its first pilot office-based opioid treatment (OBOT) program for those with OUD. This process was several years in the making as Sea Mar wanted to develop a program that did more than just writing prescriptions. Many providers that participate in receiving their waived license to prescribe buprenorphine never go on to actually treat those that struggle with OUD. Providers often cite patient complexity and lack of support as reasons for why they avoid addiction medicine. It was therefore important that Sea Mar develop a robust model that would serve the many needs of the individuals in treatment as well as the providers that offer that treatment.

Program research and development was further reinforced by the work being done at Evergreen Treatment Services (ETS), an opioid treatment program (OTP) in Western Washington. ETS has helped lead the way with many innovative practices including participation in the Washington State Medication Assisted Treatment-Prescription Drug and Opioid Addiction Project. Sea Mar decided to treat OUD as specialty medicine and located its pilot program in its behavioral health sites. Sea Mar adopted elements of Vermont's Hub and Spoke model as well as Massachusetts's Nurse Care Manager model. In the ideal model, regional OTPs with daily dosing of methadone and/or buprenorphine/naloxone serve as a "Hub" for the patients that are unable to stabilize in an outpatient OBOT setting. This seamless, bidirectional continuum of care meets the individual where they are at in terms of disease severity. Full-time registered nurses trained in addiction medicine are the linchpin to Sea Mar's MAT model. These nurse care managers (NCM) are the right hand of the waived provider helping with program screening, orientation, intake, prescription management, and follow up appointments. In addition, the NCM acts as a care coordinator for identified needs such as SUD counseling, mental health counseling, psychiatric medication management, primary care, dental, and case management. Once patients OUD has stabilized they will be transitioned back to the primary care setting to manage their MAT. Sea Mar recently opened its second MAT program, and hopes to expand this model over the coming year into its behavioral health sites within each region of western Washington. The Washington State Department of Health and Sea Mar are also sponsoring a buprenorphine waiver training course in southwest Washington and northwest Washington later this year, encouraging its providers to attend so that champions are in place for when the MAT program develops in each region.

In January of this year Sea Mar started the Six Building Blocks (6BBs) pilot under the direction of the University of Washington. The 6BBs is an evidenced-based approach that has shown great success in helping medical practices change their culture and treatment approaches for those with acute and chronic pain. This approach has shown to improve patient outcomes as well as provider satisfaction when working with these patients. This pilot has worked on developing new protocols, workflows, and treatment interventions for patients experiencing acute or chronic pain while involving all the staff in the medical site in its development. This includes exploring how opioid alternative interventions can better support COT patients such as having chronic pain groups led by the IMHTs in the primary care setting. Sea Mar hopes to expand this pilot to its other medical sites over the coming year.

More than 2.1 million Americans suffer from OUD. In 2016 over 64,000 Americans died from a drug overdose, and it is estimated to have increased over 10% in 2017 to around 72,000 deaths. Community health centers are in a unique position to make a significant impact on the opioid epidemic given the populations they serve. We must look at the scientific evidence and develop unique strategies to support our patients and providers if we are to turn the tide in an epidemic that is estimated to claim an additional 500,000 lives over the next decade. Sea Mar hopes to replicate some of these training

initiatives over the next year, and open it up to other community health centers in Washington state.

Charles Watras is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Chemical Dependency Professional, Master Addiction Counselor, and Internationally Certified Clinical Supervisor for Substance Use Disorder Treatment working as Sea Mar's Medication Assisted Treatment Program Manager. He has over 15 years' experience working in human services and served several years as Clinic Director and Supervisor for an Opioid Treatment Program in the Southern Appalachian Mountains of Western North Carolina before relocating to Washington state in 2015.

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