For Immediate Release

Mon County QRT receives new grants; PRCs still working, albeit remotely

MORGANTOWN, WV (April 22, 2020) — In spite of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Monongalia County’s Quick Response Team (QRT) is still meeting once a week — via videoconferencing — to discuss recent overdose reports, approaches to reducing drug use and how to help individuals with substance use disorder.

Meanwhile, peer recovery coaches (PRCs), who make up a vital part of the QRT as they work in the community with individuals who have overdosed, have had to temporarily change their methods to reach out to those with substance use issues.

“We’re really happy that we can continue offering care to this population in our county even with the challenges that everyone has been facing,” said Brittany Irick, QRT coordinator for Monongalia County Health Department.

Added Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD’s executive director and county health officer, “During these periods of stress, it’s important to engage vulnerable populations.”

A federal grant given to MCHD and distributed through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, will allow the QRT to operate at least through August of 2022.

It’s similar to the federal grant, also through the DHHR, that launched the Monongalia County QRT in 2019. The new federal federal funds come from an Overdose Data to Action grant (cdc.gov/drugoverdose/od2a/index.html) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Comprised of MCHD employees, law enforcement, EMS, MECCA 911, a pharmacist, a pastor and PRCs from WV PEERS, as well as other community members, the QRT...
began meeting weekly last May to address the opioid addiction problem in Monongalia County. MCHD was one of five to receive this QRT grant from the state.

According to Stacy Tressler, Mon County QRT’s data analyst, 208 overdose reports have been received through a HIPAA-compliant Dropbox since August. Furthermore, WV PEERS have connected with 212 new clients, some from the overdose reports and some from other sources, including self-referrals.

Also, 105 individuals were connected to services, which can include treatment, health care, social services and naloxone, Tressler said. Naloxone is a medication that reverses the effects of an opioid overdose. And because some individuals were connected to more than one service, individuals were connected to a total of 119 services.

Tressler, who has worked part-time as the Mon County QRT’s data analyst, has just been hired full-time as an epidemiologist for Monongalia County Health Department. She will continue her work on the QRT.

The new grant will allow these efforts to progress, Irick noted.

“This will provide funds for the PRCs to continue their work, to compensate Star City EMS and Mon EMS for their data, and purchase items such as leave-behind cards for the team to distribute,” she added.

In addition to WV PEERS, MECCA 911, Star City EMS and Mon EMS, members of the Mon County QRT include representatives from Monongalia County Sheriff’s Department, West Virginia University’s University Police Department, Granville Police Department, Westover Police Department, Monongalia County Child Advocacy Center and Pierpont Landing Pharmacy, which provides not only naloxone but also medically-assisted treatment (MAT) to help patients end drug dependency.

In addition to the new federal grant, MCHD received a second grant that will pay to contract a licensed clinical social worker to expand services and resources that the QRT can offer to individuals who have overdosed or those who are at high risk.

“This person would provide linkages to care and other support, including medical, vocational and social-related services,” Irick said. “We feel that a social worker would be a perfect complement to the existing services PRCs can offer.”

The grant, provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), will also focus on strengthening mental health resources available to first responders to help combat “burnout” and potentially more tragic outcomes.
“This grant is also an opportunity to expand our services and training opportunities through the QRT,” Irick said.

Also, WV PEERS continue to reach out to individuals who have overdosed, although because of the COVID-19 pandemic, their methods have changed for now.

Instead of following up in person to talk to an individual, PRCs go to the person’s home and leave a bag with a letter explaining who they are. Also included is naloxone and instructions on how to use it, a resource list for social services and substance use disorder treatment, and leave-behind cards for WV PEERS and Help4WV, a 24-hour helpline.

“We also provide a list of phone numbers and links for services that may be essential to getting through the crisis, such as the United Way, Workforce WV and agencies that might be able to help with rent or utility bills, food banks and lunch programs,” said Dan McCawley, program manager for WV PEERS.

There also is information on how individuals can access telecoaching, which they can do by accessing doxy.me/peerrecoverymonco or by calling 304-602-3305.

“Connection during the pandemic couldn’t be more important,” McCawley said. “We have made use of some telehealth in the past, so it hasn’t been much of a jump to ramp up our efforts to make sure it’s a consistent facet of our services. It will hopefully continue as an alternative for people with transportation barriers even after the world settles back to a sense of normal.”

That does not mean the current situation does not provide challenges. “It’s definitely difficult to have meaningful conversations with individuals who have recently overdosed while maintaining the safety of our team and the population we serve through social distancing,” McCawley said. “We are still making steady referrals to treatment, medically-assisted treatment (MAT) clinics and sober living.”

The QRT also is releasing a dot map of the overdose locations from the reports received.

“We want to show that this is a problem that is happening all over Monongalia County and not just in Morgantown,” Dr. Smith said.

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