THE ROLE OF PHARMACISTS IN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The author of this article is Barbara Goppold, R.Ph., MS, Volunteer Member of Bucks County Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) and the Southeastern PA Surge Medical Assistance Response Team (SEPA SMART).

Over the last decade, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has experienced many natural disasters and events that have required a response from the emergency preparedness teams in the state. Many of these teams are staffed by volunteers, both medical and non-medical, who dedicate time to training, deploying, and providing assistance.

The value of pharmacists on emergency response teams has increased in visibility with the potential for mass immunizations, the use of prophylactic antibiotics and the creation of the strategic national stockpile (SNS). Pharmacists can utilize their skills in storing, dispensing, and inventorying medications and in clinical roles such as calculating pediatric doses, triage, and first aid.

In Pennsylvania, any citizen interested in helping these efforts should consider registering with serv.pa.gov. This state emergency registry for medical and non-medical volunteers is described as:

“… your secure, confidential volunteer registry site. Registering through SERVPA simply tells us that you are open to the idea of volunteering in the case of an emergency and provides us a little about your background, preferences, and constraints. It does not guarantee that you will be called upon, nor does it mean that you must participate if called. If you are called to volunteer, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the specific event and the commitment required. You can then choose if volunteering for the specific event is right for you. During the online registration process, you will be asked to enter information regarding the best way to contact you, any active licenses or certifications, and other relevant background data.”

In addition to registering with SERVPA, the following organizations are recruiting health care professional volunteers and would benefit from pharmacist participation. These are each listed within SERVPA and are very appropriate for pharmacists. Each website below provides information on their mission statements and how to apply for membership.

- Medical Reserve Corps - this is a national organization with units across the country and within the state of PA. Use this link to find a local unit – mrc.hhs.gov. There are 17 MRC units in Pennsylvania.
- SouthEastern PA Surge Medical Assistance Response Team - sepasmrt.org
- Northwest PA State Medical Assistance Team - nwpasmat2.com
- Special Medical Response Team - smrteam.com
It is also very important to remember that resilience in a disaster can improve with being prepared. Websites such as FEMA.gov and redcross.org provide information on preparedness and readiness for families, pets, homes and communities. Registering with public.coderedweb.com allows the public to receive warnings via texts, emails and other channels about emergencies, severe weather, and local road closures. Smart911.com is another step to consider in planning for a personal emergency. Please visit their website and consider registering in advance of calling 9-1-1.

One final consideration involves being proactive and planning for businesses’ continuity. Pharmacists with ownership, management and leadership roles in pharmacies and business entities must work with their organizations to plan for disasters and emergencies.

Please make a conscious decision to prepare for a disaster and consider volunteering as a pharmacist!

Disclaimer: Any opinions provided in this article are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the State Board of Pharmacy, the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs, or the Department of State.

NALOXONE AVAILABILITY AND PHYSICIAN GENERAL DR. RACHEL LEVINE’S STANDING ORDER

The author is Robert Frankil, R.Ph, President, Sellersville Pharmacy, Inc., independent retail pharmacy member of the State Board of Pharmacy.

As we all know, the opioid epidemic in Pennsylvania and across the country is crippling our society. Despite increased awareness lately, overdose deaths continue to rise. As of the date that this article was prepared, over 3,500 people had died from drug overdoses in 2016 -- a 30 percent increase over 2015. That’s an alarming rate of 21 per 100,000 people. This year across the country, more people will die of drug overdoses than were lost in the entire Vietnam War.

There have been several tools introduced and made available to help curb this epidemic. Prescribing guidelines for opiates have been affirmed by the State Board of Medicine and dispensing guidelines for opiates have been affirmed by the State Board of Pharmacy. The Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) is now up and running, where pharmacists and prescribers can check and see all controlled substances dispensed for any patient in PA. These are tools to help control the abundance of dangerous drugs that can get into the hands of the wrong people, and lead to addiction and drug overdoses.
But, addiction and drug overdoses will still happen. That’s why our Physician General, Dr. Rachel Levine, has issued a standing order for all residents of Pennsylvania to be able to get naloxone in their hands to save a life.

Naloxone is a drug that will temporarily block the effects of opiates, including heroin and oxycodone. If someone has overdosed, and breathing has become shallow or stopped, administering naloxone can reverse these symptoms and bring them back.

An excerpt from the official press release published on October 28, 2015:

Harrisburg, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today continued his “Government That Works” Tour and announced a significant step forward in his administration’s fight against the heroin epidemic in Pennsylvania. Governor Wolf stood with Physician General Dr. Rachel Levine at the Pennsylvania Medical Society as Dr. Levine signed a statewide standing order for naloxone*, a medication that can reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug. The governor was also joined by Secretary Ted Dallas, Secretary Gary Tennis, Secretary Karen Murphy, and Chairman Josh Shapiro.

“This standing order is the next step in my administration’s fight against the addiction and overdose epidemic in our state,” said Governor Wolf. “We must do all that we can to support those Pennsylvania families suffering from the effects of addiction. I am proud to take this action with my cabinet members today.”

Through the signing of this standing order, Dr. Levine has signed a prescription for naloxone to all Pennsylvanians. For more information about naloxone and how to administer it, please visit the Department of Drug and Alcohol Program’s page on overdose reversal.

You may review the entire Press Release, the Opioid Dispensing Guidelines (PDF) and Naloxone Standing Order for General Public (PDF).

As pharmacists, we should all be educated and informed as to the availability of naloxone. The standing order authorizes naloxone to be dispensed to anyone who wants to have it on hand. Naloxone is available in 3 forms:

~An auto-injector (trade name Evzio®)

~An intramuscular injection, accompanied by an atomizer to convert the injection to a nasal spray

~A nasal spray (trade name Narcan®)

All PA Medicaid plans are mandated to cover at least one of these forms. Commercial coverage varies. The prescription should be issued in the name of the individual obtaining the naloxone,
not in the name of the intended recipient of the drug. The insurance to be billed is the person whose name is on the prescription. Document the prescription in your files with “Per standing order from Dr. Rachel Levine” who is considered the prescriber.

Please consider stocking naloxone in your pharmacy. Educate yourself and the staff about this important statewide standing order, as well as Act 139 of 2014, which provides immunity from civil, criminal, and licensure disciplinary actions for prescribers and dispensers. Read Act 139 here. As part of the standing order, educating the patient is mandatory so that signs and symptoms of an overdose will be recognized, and administration of the naloxone is done properly.

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