

DOH issues emergency regulations on expanding use of Narcan to prevent opioid overdose deaths

PROVIDENCE – Director of Health, **MICHAEL FINE, MD**, has issued emergency regulations aimed at preventing opioid overdose deaths by expanding access to the overdose antidote, naloxone (also known as Narcan), and establishing procedures for its administration to a person experiencing an overdose.

Rhode Island is in the midst of a severe drug overdose crisis, as evidenced by the 55 opioid-related deaths HEALTH has investigated since the beginning of the year. In addition to drug-abuse prevention and treatment strategies, getting Narcan into the hands of more people has become an immediate priority in the fight to save lives.

Dating back to at least 1988, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) have carried Narcan as a standing-order medication that can be administered to individuals for whom it is not specifically prescribed.

Under the new regulations:

- Any licensed prescriber can now issue a non-patient-specific order to certain organizations, such as police departments and treatment facilities;
- Narcan can be prescribed to a family member or friend of an individual at risk of experiencing an opioid-related overdose;
- Any licensed prescriber may now dispense Narcan to family members or others on site, during an office or emergency department visit.

These changes enable Narcan to be in the hands of those most likely to discover an overdose victim. This could potentially save a life that could otherwise be lost if the victim had to wait for an EMT to administer the antidote.

Last month, the State Police announced plans to carry Narcan. Several local police departments are considering the same. The new regulations will allow all departments to easily obtain it.

When administered in a timely way, Narcan counteracts the life-threatening depression of the central nervous and respiratory systems caused by an overdose. Narcan has reportedly reversed more than 10,000 overdoses nationwide. Since January 1, 2014, EMTs have administered 273 doses of Narcan to Rhode Island patients. Narcan is still available without a prescription at all Walgreens pharmacies in Rhode Island.

The full version of the new Rules and Regulations Pertaining to Opioid Overdose Prevention can be found at: <http://sos.ri.gov/documents/archives/reg-docs/released/pdf/DOH/7687.pdf> ❖

NIH renews Miriam grant for AIDS clinical trials group

PROVIDENCE – A \$2.4 million grant renewal will support The Miriam Hospital's continued efforts in research and new treatments for HIV and AIDS.

KAREN TASHIMA, MD, the lead researcher at The Miriam, received the National Institutes of Health grant renewal. Dr. Tashima leads the ACTG's Providence site, which operates under the program's Harvard/Boston/Providence Clinical Trials Unit.

The ACTG is a global network of 60 research sites with its operations and laboratory center based at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. The ACTG conducts clinical trials in HIV-infected adults to test novel therapeutic interventions focused on HIV-associated inflammation and resulting end-organ disease, tuberculosis, viral hepatitis and HIV cure.

Dr. Tashima said, "We are thrilled with the results that have come from the ACTG Network. The Miriam Hospital has been part of the Network since 2000. Our work has allowed us to foster new investigations and treatments for treating HIV and AIDS."

She added, "The ACTG is an important HIV clinical studies network that, for example, proved that mother to child transmission could be dramatically reduced by having the pregnant woman take the anti-HIV medication AZT. Results of other ACTG studies have changed how we treat HIV infection, and have resulted in Department of Health and Human Services HIV guideline changes leading to improvements nationally in the standard of care for HIV treatment."

Dr. Tashima was the lead investigator and study chair for the OPTIONS trial that was conducted at 64 sites across the continental U.S. and in Puerto Rico. The OPTIONS trial was a multi-site study that showed patients with drug-resistant HIV can safely achieve viral suppression – the primary goal of HIV therapy – without incorporating the traditional class of HIV medications into their treatment regimen. The ACTG trial showed for the first time that treatment-experienced patients can leave out this class of medication, known as nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTI), as part of the regimen. Treatment-experienced patients already need to take three active medications in order to achieve viral suppression, so eliminating NRTI medications can lessen pill burden and side effects.

The Miriam Hospital treats more than 1,500 patients with HIV who are under ongoing care. The grant renewal will allow The Miriam to continue to serve as an ACTG clinical research site for the 2014-2020 time period. ❖

RWMC certified by Joint Commission for hip, knee replacements

PROVIDENCE – Roger Williams Medical Center has received The Joint Commission's Gold Seal of Approval for its total hip and knee replacement programs. To achieve certification, Roger Williams total joint replacement program hosted an onsite evaluation in December 2013 by a Joint Commission reviewer.

The evaluation looked at the program's compliance with The Joint Commission's rigorous standards of care including providing efficient care and preventing the spread of infections as much as possible.

"By adhering to The Joint Commission's strict clinical guidelines, our team continuously provides the highest level of orthopedic care to our patients," said **LOUIS J. MARIORENZI, MD**, director of the Division of Orthopedics at Roger Williams. ❖