



**Office of the
Chief Medical
Health Officer**

February 8, 2017

REQUEST TO PHYSICIANS TO JOIN NETWORK TO TREAT OPIOID USE DISORDERS

Dear General Practice Physicians caring for same population as served by Island Health:

As you are likely aware, in April 2016 the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, declared a public health emergency related to the increased incidence of drug overdose fatalities in BC.

In 2016, there were 914 drug overdose deaths reported in BC, an increase of almost 80% over the number of deaths in 2015. The number of illicit drug overdose deaths in December 2016 (142) was the highest recorded in a month in BC and is more than double the monthly average of illicit drug overdose deaths since 2015. The overdose emergency has touched all communities in British Columbia, with some communities impacted harder than others.

Many people at highest risk of overdose may have opioid use disorders, for which they are not engaged and retained in effective treatment. Opioid agonist treatments (OAT)—medications such as buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone®) and methadone—are the most effective, evidence-based treatments in reducing non-medical use of opioids, improving physical health and reducing death rates. Island Health is working on improving the reach of OAT in our region by working on the creation of an in-hospital addictions program in south island as well as enhancing methadone and buprenorphine/naloxone distribution in the community through a variety of partnerships.

In addition, as of July 1, 2016, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC) removed the requirement for physicians to hold a methadone license in order to prescribe buprenorphine/naloxone (Suboxone), meaning that now, once trained, every physician in BC is able to prescribe this live-saving medication without a special exemption.

I am contacting you to inquire about your willingness to join a network of regional General Practitioners (GPs) with experience or interest in treating opioid use disorders with buprenorphine/naloxone. Such a network would offer physicians a community of practice and a way to share expertise and information about ancillary supports in treating this patient population.

Interested physicians are encouraged to contact Island Health’s Mental Health and Substance Use program addictions leads via Keely.Armstrong@viha.ca (250-370-8396).

The British Columbia Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU) is a new provincial resource for clinical guidance, medical education and scientific research on addictions. The BCCSU has been working with regional Divisions of Family Practice to provide educational sessions on opioid use disorder treatment with buprenorphine/naloxone. If you are interested in an educational session on these new guidelines, please make your Division leadership aware of your interest.

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Richard Stanwick, CMHO
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After Hours On Call

1.800.204.6166

Division leads should contact Cheyenne Johnson (Cheyenne.johnson@cfenet.ubc.ca) regarding opportunities for educational sessions or forums and additional educational material and opportunities.

The BCCSU is also able to provide addiction treatment expert support for GPs through the provincial Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise (RACE) shared care telephone advice line. It is available for general practice or other physicians and is open Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., 1-877-696-2131.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard S. Stanwick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard S. Stanwick, MD, MSc, FRCPC, FAAP
Chief Medical Health Officer