

Island Health emergency physician leads opioid substitution therapy project

September, 2017



Dr. Jason Wale presents his Physician Quality Improvement project.

Across British Columbia, more than 900 people died from overdose last year. This is more than three times the total number of annual deaths from automobile accidents in BC. The majority of these people had encounters with the health-care system in the year prior to death, and most of these encounters were in emergency departments. As an emergency physician at RJH and VGH, Dr. Jason Wale recognized the need to shift the emergency department culture to try and prevent overdose deaths. The Physician Quality Improvement initiative provided the opportunity to start.

The Physician Quality Improvement initiative is the result of collaboration between Doctors of BC, the Ministry of Health and Island Health. Physicians with quality improvement ideas apply to the program and accepted applications receive one-year of support. This includes quality

improvement curriculum delivered in a cohort workshop environment and support from a dedicated team to help their quality improvement project. The projects vary in scope - 2016 cohort projects range from sleep apnea-related heart failure to umbilical cord clamping processes.

Dr. Wale and his team focused on improving access to the opioid substitution therapy Suboxone for emergency department patients with opioid addiction. The team worked with the Victoria Rapid Addiction Access Clinic, Youth Clinic and Cool Aid Clinics to standardize emergency department rapid referral protocols at both the Victoria General and Royal Jubilee emergency departments. The goal of the project is to offer all opioid addicted patients in emergency departments the opportunity for substitution therapy and immediate referral to addictions treatment.

Results from the project show that emergency department physicians and nurses are now starting to feel more comfortable administering opioid substitution therapies and referrals to various community providers are increasing.

Jason and his team look forward to all emergency departments adopting these strategies to help turn the rising tide of opioid deaths. With the positive results of their PQI project, they have taken the first step in enhancing patient care.

Physicians interested in PQI should reach out to PQI manager, Carolyn Carlson (PQI@viha.ca 250-331-8626) for more information. Physicians are always encouraged to reach out about potential projects.