Innovations Against Opioid Epidemic Show Promise

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Although data shows that substance use disorder is still widespread, innovations in treatment are showing promise. The opioid crisis continues to dominate national conversation, with thousands of people dying from overdose each year. But there is a reason to be optimistic about the progress being made in the medical and health care communities.

A recent Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) report shows that the total number of opioid prescriptions filled by members has declined 29 percent since 2013. Of the opioid prescriptions filled in 2017, 45 percent were within the CDC?s recommended guidelines for the dose and duration least likely to contribute to misuse, up from 39 percent in 2013.

Blue Cross Blue Shield is dedicated to combating the opioid crisis and plans to team up with community partners to address the problem.

?Unlike other chronic diseases, such as diabetes or heart disease, substance abuse is often considered a personal weakness,? said Lorina Marshall-Blake, president of the Independence Blue Cross Foundation. ?We hear again and again how drug abuse is a self-inflicted problem, and that people who use drugs are flawed.?

This is one of the roadblocks that are keeping addicted individuals from receiving the care they need. The stigma needs to be addressed and addiction needs to be treated just like any other medical condition. It used billboards, print stories, and videos in order to raise awareness on the issue of addiction. The campaign worked to spread the message that addiction is a disease that needs proper treatment.

?We want to let those who are struggling know that recovery is possible; there are others fighting the same battle and you can too,? Marshall-Blake says. ?They are parents and grandparents, artists, veterans, community leaders and advocates for recovery. In short, they are someone familiar.?

In addition to shifting the public?s perception, medical experts are tackling abuse using other methods. The Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) of Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Maine is tackling addiction recovery through a groundbreaking partnership with Aware Recovery Care. Aware offers an alternative to traditional residential treatment options, reaching more BCBS members and their families through in-home programs. Click the link to see Cleveland's top rehab placement programs.

?The partnership with Aware maximizes our opportunities for innovation,? said Stephen Friedhoff, MD, chief clinical officer and senior vice president at Anthem. ?There are circumstances where multiple weeks residential or inpatient intervention is necessary, but studies show only about 10-30% of people show sustained recovery after leaving inpatient and residential treatment.?

The Aware Recovery Care program is a multidisciplinary medical team that works with a member in their home, often using a combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy to create an individualized approach.

?It?s not always realistic that someone can leave their job or their family for weeks,? said Friedhoff. ?This is a wonderful opportunity not only for people in that position but also for people who may have tried an inpatient program in the past.?

Friedhoff expects the industry will further innovate in the field of addiction treatment. If someone in the family is struggling with opioid addiction, it is important to seek help. A combination of medical detox and behavioral therapy can go a long way in the fight against drug abuse. But because every individual is affected by addiction differently, a comprehensive program tailored to their specific needs is necessary. Look for a nearby addiction treatment facility today and find out how drug treatment programs work.

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