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Sent: Tuesday, May 2, 2017 9:34 PM
To: CityClerk
Cc: Diana Lejins
Subject: Agenda Item #14 Medical Marijuana

Please furnish the following to the Mayor and Councilmembers for tonight's agenda item #14 and add it to the record.

Orange County drug, alcohol deaths soar 82 percent, with accidental opioid overdoses the primary cause
David Whiting
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Orange County's drug and alcohol death toll has skyrocketed, and the most common cause of death was accidental overdoses from prescription opioids such as OxyContin. (AP Photo/Toby Talbot, File)

Orange County drug and alcohol deaths have skyrocketed 82 percent since the millennium and hospitalizations cost more than \$100 million a year, according to a major new OC Health Care Agency report.

During 2013-2015, the county averaged about 5,500 drug and alcohol hospitalizations each year, and 700 deaths annually from substance abuse.

The most common cause of death was accidental overdoses from prescription opioids such as OxyContin and Hydrocodone.

“Nearly half of all overdose deaths were due to accidental overdose of prescription drugs,” the report stated. “This highlights the importance of focusing prevention efforts to address the rising opioid consumption among residents.”

Overdose deaths also present a grim map, according to the report, “Drug & Alcohol Morbidity & Mortality in Orange County.”

“Cities with relatively higher overdose deaths tended to include coastal cities followed by South County locales,” the report said. “More specifically, Laguna Woods had the highest overdose death rate at 50.8 per 100,000, followed by Dana Point (40.1), Seal Beach (33.8), Laguna Beach (31.4), and San Juan Capistrano.”

Cities with the lowest death rates included Irvine, Trabuco Canyon, Foothill Ranch and Coto de Caza.

More than three-fourths of the victims were white, and — reflecting national trends — far more men died than women.

“Male residents had twice the rate of overdose deaths due to drugs and alcohol at 29.5 (per 100,000),” the agency noted, “compared to females at 14.4 (per 100,000).”

More women than men died from prescription drugs, but more men than women died from illicit drugs.

The coroner’s office reported that 66.8 percent of deaths involved opioids, factoring in illicit drugs such as heroin. Yet when factoring out illicit drugs, the office still blamed more than half the overdoses on prescription drugs.

The coroner also determined that more than three-fourths of the fatal overdoses were accidental.

For hospitalizations, the worst hit cities were along the coast and headed inland, reaching from San Clemente to Rancho Santa Margarita. Yet heavy hospitalization percentages also were found in Fountain Valley, North Tustin and Los Alamitos.

The report also found that the average hospital stay was 4.3 days and cost more than \$26,000. Hospitalization costs during the three-year period totaled \$430 million.

The study also discovered that 360 Orange County residents were hospitalized for opioid dependence in 2015, but during that same year only one person was hospitalized for cannabis dependence.

Among the report’s surprises: The overwhelming number of patients with drug and alcohol problems weren’t teens and young adults, but older people. The report determined that adults age 25 to 64 accounted for 72 percent of all hospitalizations, with the highest cluster between 45 and 54 years old.

Still, there is at least a little relief from the deadly statistics.

Curtis Condon, research manager for the Health Care Agency, pointed out, “We don’t have the same levels of mortality as some other parts of the country.”

At the same time, Condon was careful, Tuesday, to explain the importance of the report.

“Our goal is to highlight the trends to better target our efforts at outreach and treatment,” he said. “The report says we need to do more to reach out to the folks who live in (coastal) parts of the county and raise awareness.”

As a sobering reminder, the health official noted, “A lot of those opioid overdose deaths are accidental. People build up a tolerance or mix prescriptions with other drugs and alcohol.”

The agency’s report follows a similar review released three years ago.

Working to make the World a better place,
diana lejins