

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple A Day, Lake Region Health Care's health and wellness statement, where we feature news and information that you can use to live a healthier life. My guest today is Diane Thorson, from Ottertail County Public Health, and she's here to talk with us today about a very important topic and event that's coming up in our community around the topic of opioid and heroine abuse. Good morning Diane.

Diane Thorson: Good morning. It's nice to be here today.

Katie Johnson: Thank you for joining me. We have a community conversation that is coming up, that Lake Region Health Care is co-sponsoring in partnership with Ottertail County Public Health, and Partnership for Health, to invite our community to talk about this important issue of opioid and heroine abuse. Before we talk about the event itself, I'm wondering if you can give me some background or some data on how big of an issue this is in our state or our community.

Diane Thorson: In the past year, we've been hearing a lot more about the opioid misuse and abuse type situation. We've been hearing about deaths from opioid overdoses in neighboring communities, we know that we've had a few of them in our county. We've been tracking data related to the number of prescriptions that are written for opioid use to just get an idea of how big the issue is in our county and we know that a lot of people are needing and using opioid prescriptions for a variety of different reasons. Actually right now, we could almost say that for every person that we have in Ottertail County there's at least two prescriptions written.

Katie Johnson: Wow. I know that you can't really go anywhere without people really talking about this topic, whether it be about that they need it for their pain, and they're having trouble getting it because of the restrictions and the concerns or the simple concerns about their teenagers or anyone who happens to have a prescription being offered money for their prescriptions. There's so many facets to this issue as well.

Diane Thorson: Exactly. We've held some meetings with our health care people as well as law enforcement and human services and there's a lot of issues around the issue of opioid use. It might be that we're seeing burglaries, because people are trying to break into homes and maybe find prescription drugs that they can steal and then sell on the street. Because not everybody who gets a prescription always uses all of their prescription, they might use it for those first few days when they need it but then what do they do with the balance of it? So then it might be there and be tempting, as other people come into your home and may see them, or ask to use the bathroom and see them in the medicine cabinet and then suddenly they disappear. So in other communities they worked with their law enforcement personnel and said, when you're doing arrests and you find prescription drug bottles in the vehicles or in the home type situation, take a look, does the prescription bottle match the name of the person that you're arresting and that opened to the eyes to the law enforcement community that they may not know

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the depth of the stealing, or misuse of drugs related to crime related activities. When we talk to the health care people, we hear a lot about the people who are coming to take and get their medications filled or I know that Lake Region has changed their policies as far as prescriptions that they'll write through the emergency room for people who are just seeking medications for pain control, without treating their entire condition. Across the state, many different places have begun to look at this and we think it's time that our communities take a look at it as well.

Katie Johnson: And that's exactly why we're hosting this community conversation on the topic. We have a couple of guest speakers who will be joining us to help spur that conversation. They include Kevin Wallavand, the WDAY reporter who has done a special reporting series on the topic and Kurt Devine, a doctor from CHI-St. Gabriel's Health from Little Falls who's had some experience with this. Can you tell our listeners why you chose those speakers and what they can expect to learn from them?

Diane Thorson: Well, we know that Kevin does a wonderful job of digging to root causes of issues and learning about the situation and putting faces to the issue and we want him to share what were some of the issues that he learned as he interviewed people that were dealing with this issue and what was the impact on them so that we can set the tone of really putting faces to this issue. And then our physician friend from Little Falls, they've been working with it and he's going to share with us some of the things they learned in their community and some ideas that worked for them, to help spur our thoughts and thinking. And then we're going to break into some small group discussions. So that we want to hear from the people that are presenting. Now that you've heard, what are the impacts of this and the feelings that people have around it, and some potential options. What do we think might work in our community and how might we go about doing that. This is our opportunity to really sit back and listen from you, listen to the people who come and ask them to help us get involved with this, because this isn't a situation we can solve ourselves.

Katie Johnson: That's so true. Speaking of that, who should consider attending this event?

Diane Thorson: We would like anyone who has a concern or interest. Maybe you know of a family member or a loved one that you're concerned about. And because of that you have your own feelings of how this is. We need to hear that from you and to help us address the issue as well. So we're really looking for anyone and everyone in the community. Even the persons who need to have the drugs on a regular basis, we need to hear from them too, in terms of how do we make it available to them, what about the concerns in terms of accidental overdose, because we've heard of those situations. How do we potentially respond to that? There was a new law passed last year that allows us to make the drugs available to counteract a potential overdose. Is there interest in having that service become available in our community and if so, then who do we work with to get that to happen?

Katie Johnson: So open to the public, we haven't mentioned the date yet, I should do that. It will be held on Tuesday, June 13th, here at M State in Fergus Falls, at 5:30. We expect it to wrap up by about 7:00 that evening. What are the other components of the

night, you mentioned earlier having a prescription that you don't fully use, so one of the other components of the night is going to be a special drop off for the Take It To The Box program. Can you tell us more about that?

Diane Thorson: A couple of years ago, we started the Take It To The Box program primarily because we wanted to protect our water supply, because we were finding prescription drugs starting to show up in underground water supplies. So we started the Take It To The Box program to recapture prescription drugs that are no longer being used for a variety of different reasons. Maybe you didn't react to that one, maybe you no longer need it, but there's some leftover. So we have the Take It To The Box program, the Take It To The Box is available at all of our law enforcement, the police stations across the county as well as the Sheriff's Office here in Fergus Falls and in Ottertail. So it's very protected, no questions asked, you just bring in your prescriptions, drop them in the box and then our law enforcement community takes and logs the volume of what they have collected over a period of time, and then they work in partnership with our solid waste department to take them to a site to have them disposed of in a way that they will not contaminate our water supply.

Katie Johnson: So we are also going to have a Take It To The Box night at the community conversation at M State, is that correct?

Diane Thorson: Exactly. We have Barry from the law enforcement department here, or Ottertail County Sheriff's Department, is planning to be there that night with a container, so if you've got unused medications and you want to get rid of them, please bring them that night, we'll be excited to see how many pounds of unused drugs we can collect, because I know that I have some in my medicine cabinet from my recent surgery when I had the prescription but I didn't need to fill it.

Katie Johnson: Right. And I have to admit, I have a couple that I can bring as well. My son just had his wisdom teeth out, didn't use that full prescription, had an injury earlier in the year, I have that sitting at home, which I really shouldn't. And it's good to bring this topic to the forefront and provide this opportunity. Diane, anything else that you want our listeners to know about this topic or this event in particular?

Diane Thorson: Not anything else that I can think of. We're just happy to be able to sponsor the event, we're able to receive some funding from the state of Minnesota from our state innovation model grant, it's called our Accountable Community For Health project, so help us to have an accountable community and help us to address this important issue.

Katie Johnson: We do invite everyone to join us for the community conversation about opioid and heroine abuse next Tuesday, June 13th and M State. It will be held in Legacy Hall starting at 5:30 that evening. If you would like to attend, we do ask you to help us plan for the size of the crowd by emailing jmchua@lrhc.org or if you give us a call at 736-8000, we can pass that message along to Joanna or give you that email address again. Again, it's Tuesday, June 13th, our community conversation about opioid and heroine abuse and Diane Thorson, thank you for joining me to talk about this

important topic this morning.

Diane Thorson: Thank you for having me.

Katie Johnson: Diane Thorson and Katie Johnson on Apple A Day Today, reminding you that there is so much to do here, stay healthy for it. Have a great day.