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Mayor Emanuel Takes Steps To Fight Opioid Epidemic

Calls for seven-day limit on opioids for acute pain

Mayor Rahm Emanuel today announced new efforts to prevent over-dispensing of opioids as part of a continued fight against the opioid epidemic. Today, Mayor Emanuel sent a letter to the city's largest employers asking them to join in an effort that would limit opioids dispensed for acute pain to seven days in an effort to restrict the availability of unused prescriptions on the illegal street market.

"We all have a responsibility to ensure that we are tackling the opioid crisis head-on and to take a proactive role to reduce the unnecessary supply of opioids," said Mayor Emanuel. "Following CDC guidelines, we can compassionately limit the availability of opioids on the illegal market and send a powerful signal to the pharmaceutical industry."

Over the past year, the City has worked to implement a policy for City employee health plans to limit the number of days a City employee can receive opioids for acute pain to seven days. Limiting the number of opioids dispensed to a seven-day prescription citywide would restrict the flow of opioids to the street and contribute to ending the epidemic of opioid addiction. In Chicago alone, there were at least 741 deaths due to opioid overdose in 2016, a 74% increase from the year before. The sale of prescribed opioids in the US rose four-fold between 1999 and 2010, even though there were no increases in reports of pain.

"Chicago is committed to ensuring safe prescription practices," said CDPH Commissioner Julie Morita, M.D. "By limiting the number of days opioids can be dispensed for acute pain, we are practicing responsible opioid stewardship."

The seven-day limit follows guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. A longer supply may be approved when strict coverage conditions are met and confirmed by a clinician, including treatment for pain due to cancer or a terminal condition, pain managed through hospice or palliative care, moderate to severe chronic pain that requires opioids, or acute pain that requires opioids for more than 10 days.

"Helping promote the safe and effective use of prescription opioids is one of the ways Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois is working to combat the opioid crisis that affects so many of our members and our communities," said Tom Allen, M.D., medical director, behavioral health at Blue

Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois. “We’re focusing on patient safety by limiting the quantity of opioids dispensed until there can be additional review for our City of Chicago members – as well as other members insured through their employers or the individual market.”

“The opioid crisis is a complicated issue that didn’t begin overnight and won’t be solved overnight,” said Derica Rice, President, CVS Caremark, the pharmacy benefit management business of CVS Health. “That’s why CVS Health is committed to helping address the abuse and misuse of prescription opioids in a number of ways, including by working with our employer clients to manage utilization of these potent medications while providing appropriate patient access. The success of our program for the City of Chicago is a great example of the difference we can make together to combat opioid abuse and misuse.”

Under the leadership of Mayor Emanuel, the city has taken a series of steps to prevent opioid addiction, reduce overdose deaths, and end deceptive marketing and over-prescribing of opioids that has contributed to a national epidemic of addiction and overdose in Chicago and across the country.

- The city has doubled its investment in substance addiction programs and overdose reversal over the past three years, including an additional \$500,000 annual investment this year, with all additional dollars being focused on the opioid epidemic.
- CDPH has expanded outreach and education initiatives, including engaging residents through community health workers, spearheading the Heroin Task Force, educating thousands of healthcare providers in medically assisted treatment and launching www.OvercomeOpioids.com, an online resource providing information about addiction, recovery and local services for residents, their family members and community advocates.
- Last year, Chicago established the country’s toughest regulation on pharmaceutical representatives to protect residents from predatory marketing of prescription drugs. More than 1,500 pharmaceutical representatives obtained the Regulated Business License, freeing up revenue that is being invested in opioid addiction treatment and screenings for approximately 4,000 residents in 2017, mostly on Chicago’s West Side. In addition, the city filed a lawsuit against major drug manufacturers for deceptive marketing.
- The City’s \$250,000 annual investment in naloxone, a life-saving medication that stops an opioid overdose, helped reverse 1,544 overdoses between July 2016 and June 2017, and distribute 4,541 naloxone kits to communities across the city. Earlier this year, the Chicago Police Department announced it will be providing naloxone to officers and training them on how to administer it to save a life if they witness an overdose. In 2015, the Chicago Fire Department, which has carried naloxone for decades, expanded its deployment of the medication to its entire fleet of nearly 300 responding vehicles.

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