



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Media Note:** Quotes from the CEOs and Administrators follow at the end of this release.

## Four counties take bold steps to address prescription drug misuse

Today, Monday, Jan. 31, in the presence of many witnesses, Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from twelve participating hospitals and four health departments from Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties gathered to make a public proclamation of their commitment to support a multi-faceted campaign to address **Responsible Prescriptions Use** at a media event at Twin Lakes Park Auditorium in Sarasota.

This leadership group of hospitals and health departments are taking a collaborative approach to address prescription drug misuse. The goal is to ensure that health care providers and dispensers of prescription medication have the tools and education necessary to prescribe responsibly and connect patients to community resources that may be needed. Their intent is not to create negative outcomes for the legitimate patient, such as the under-treatment of his or her pain.

“We recognize that our access to physicians and patients positions us as unique partners in addressing this problem,” says Tom Rice, CEO of Fawcett Memorial Hospital in Port Charlotte. “But we also recognize the work that law enforcement, community coalitions, state and local governments and schools have been doing for years. As healthcare providers, we have a role to play – and we want to play that role well – but we also want to work in concert with other efforts, and develop stronger linkages and partnerships.”

The most significant part of the group’s plan has to do with educating our medical community about this issue. They are developing a unique, locally-relevant educational course that will be offered throughout the region in the spring. This course will provide our physicians and other medical professionals with evidenced-based recommendations for safe prescribing and tools for identifying prescription drug misuse, and will serve as an opportunity to create linkages with local addiction resources as well as local law enforcement. “Our local physicians need up-to-date medical strategies to be able to effectively respond to this epidemic of pill diversion and abuse,” says Mary Ruiz, President/CEO of Manatee Glens.

[Met Life](#) is the sponsor of the physician education forums that are being planned.

Other strategies include educating health department and hospital patients about safe storage and disposal of prescription drugs, and disseminating data about the prescription drug epidemic in our region.

Prescription drug abuse has been described as the most threatening substance abuse issue in the State of Florida, responsible for seven Floridian deaths per day. Regionally, prescription drug deaths are higher than ever before, with over 80 percent of drug-related deaths associated with prescription drug misuse.

Since 2007, all substance abuse related Emergency Room (ER) admissions in the four-county region have increased, with opioid-related admissions increasing 25 percent.

In 2009, drugs caused 249 deaths – and prescription drugs were specifically identified as a cause of death 86 percent of the time in this four-county region. (213 instances)

“Prescription drug abuse is not just on the rise – the spikes we’re seeing in our hospital and across the nation are dramatic, indiscriminate and deeply disturbing. The problem crosses all ages and socioeconomic levels – from soccer moms and working professionals to high school honor students and home-bound elderly – and now, sadly, it’s impacting even newborn babies,” says Gwen MacKenzie, CEO for Sarasota Memorial Health Care System.

“Our hope is that the rate of misuse will be curbed in those counties already experiencing a serious problem, and prevented from spreading to communities where the issue is not currently as serious,” says Jennifer Bencie, M.D., administrator for the Manatee County Health Department. By addressing this issue together, they have the opportunity to learn from each other, share tools and best practices and raise awareness about this issue in the region. Their plan is likely to evolve and expand throughout 2011 as our hospitals and health departments continue to convene around this issue.

The Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) has spearheaded this four-county multi-healthcare organization agreement through its Health Provocateur Project, which includes CEOs of every hospital and health department in these counties. Since 2005, CHIP has convened these regional healthcare leaders, facilitating dialogue and urging this unique public-private partnership to serve as an innovative model for improving population health in the region.

For more information about the Health Provocateur Project, visit [www.CHIP4Health.org/leadership/provocateur.htm](http://www.CHIP4Health.org/leadership/provocateur.htm) )

For information about the **SafeRx campaign**, visit [www.CHIP4Health.org/saferx](http://www.CHIP4Health.org/saferx).

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**(As an addendum to this release, quotes from hospital CEOs and health department administrators follow)**



## Quotes from Regional Leaders

### Manatee County

#### [Manatee Glens](#)

"Our local physicians need up-to date medical strategies to be able to effectively respond to this epidemic of pill diversion and abuse."

**President/CEO Mary Ruiz**

### Sarasota County

#### [Doctors Hospital of Sarasota](#)

"I am very hopeful that with the collaboration of all regional hospitals through CHIP, we will bring a heightened sense of awareness for the need to address this issue."

**Robert Meade, CEO of Doctors Hospital of Sarasota**

#### [Sarasota Memorial Health Care System](#)

"Prescription drug abuse is not just on the rise – the spikes we're seeing in our hospital and across the nation are dramatic, indiscriminate and deeply disturbing. The problem crosses all ages and socioeconomic levels – from soccer moms and working professionals to high school honor students and home-bound elderly – and now, sadly, it's impacting even newborn babies."

**- Gwen MacKenzie, CEO, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System**

"It's a pervasive problem with no easy answer, but hopefully with all of us working together, we can prevent some of the tragedies that inevitably come with drug abuse."

**- Gwen MacKenzie, Sarasota Memorial Health Care System**

#### [Venice Regional Medical Center](#) (CEO Peter Wozniak)

"Once we were given the statistics regarding the drug misuse in Sarasota County alone, it was obvious that something needed to be done. Venice Regional Medical Center and other area hospitals and health departments teamed up with CHIP to create a comprehensive plan to combat this issue."

**-Pete Wozniak, CEO of Venice Regional Medical Center**

### Charlotte County

#### [Charlotte Regional Medical Center](#)

"Charlotte Regional Medical Center welcomes the opportunity to work with other hospitals and health departments to help reverse the growing trend in prescription drug misuse. Our healthcare team is diligent in assessing potential prescription misuse, and work collaboratively to help mitigate these situations on a case by case basis. We look forward to working with the other members of the CHIP partnership, so that we can share best practices and help contribute a solution to this very serious problem."

**- José Morillo, CEO of Charlotte Regional Medical Center**

### [Fawcett Memorial Hospital](#)

“Unfortunately we see the impact of this problem every single day – in our Emergency Department (ED) There is nothing more discouraging to healthcare professionals than to work hard to revive a patient who has abused prescription drugs only to see that patient come back a week later with the same problem. Our role as a health care leader in the community is to participate in initiatives that can address problems before they result in an ED visit.”

- **Tom Rice, CEO of Fawcett Memorial Hospital**

“The Health Provocateur Group is a unique gathering of leaders in the region whose sole purpose is to identify those “big ideas” that need to be discussed, analyzed and promoted in our region to improve the health and well being of all of the people we serve.”

- **Tom Rice, CEO of Fawcett Memorial Hospital**

## **Health Departments**

### [Manatee County Health Department](#)

“Misuse and abuse of prescription drugs, coupled with the proliferation of “pill mills,” is a major public health concern. In 2009, unintentional poisoning was the leading cause of death in 20-34 year olds in our community. Partnering with the Health Provocateur workgroup enables us to better address the issue both locally and across the region.”

- **Jennifer Bencie, MD, Administrator, Manatee County Health Department**

### [Sarasota County Health Department](#)

“This issue has emerged as a leading public health concern impacting all age groups including babies who are born addicted to narcotics as well as young people who are self-medicating with these drugs and seniors living with a variety of chronic health conditions. Therefore, we are using every means possible to include those who have a stake in this issue.”

- **Bill Little, Administrator, Sarasota County Health Department**

### [Charlotte County Health Department](#)

“Prescription misuse has certainly become an issue in many ways over the years. Working together we can make a difference to be sure that medication is being used for its intended purpose, for the person that truly needs it!”

- **Mary Kary Burns, Acting Administrator, Charlotte County Health Department and  
Administrator, DeSoto County Health Department**

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