

## The Judicial Branch Opioid Symposium

The Judicial Branch Opioid Symposium on November 3 offered a prominent role for emergency medicine physicians to educate and train state employees on the origins and manifestations of the opioid crisis, what must be done to curb the widespread use of these prescription drugs, and best known treatments for those with dependence and addiction.

The symposium, which was held at Gateway Community College in New Haven, featured a host of speakers, including a presentation on the impact of the opioid epidemic in rural and urban hospitals by David Herr, MD, Chairman of the Emergency Department at Johnson Memorial Medical Center, and Vivek Parwani, MD, Chairman of the Emergency Department at Yale New Haven Hospital. Their presentation was facilitated by Carl Schiessl, JD, Director of Regulatory Advocacy, CHA.



In their presentation, the two doctors offered practical advice and tips for judicial branch employees, including probation officers, court personnel, and support services staff. Dr. Herr noted that rural areas have the highest rate of opioid deaths, primarily due to longer transport times. Urban residents are more likely to have ready access to programs for treating people with opioid dependence, he said. Dr. Parwani highlighted the challenge of balancing clinical medical needs for pain management versus the risks of abusing pain-relieving medications.

Their presentation also featured an overview of the opioid epidemic in Connecticut, noting that the epidemic defies stereotypes for typical overdose victims in Connecticut because the majority of this population are male, white, and not homeless.

Following the presentation by Dr. Herr and Dr. Parwani, participants at the symposium should have been able to understand and explain the breadth and scope of the opioid epidemic throughout urban, suburban, and rural areas of Connecticut; demonstrate a familiarity with the voluntary prescribing guidelines in emergency departments; appreciate the perspective of emergency medicine physicians on opioid prescribing in EDs; and understand the challenges of opioid abuse prevention and detection, and the experiences of patients and their families with regard to treatment.

The keynote speaker for the symposium was Michael Saxe, MD, Chairman Emeritus of the Middlesex Hospital Emergency Department. Dr. Saxe also led a discussion on the American opioid epidemic, and participated in a concluding panel.

Connecticut hospitals have been engaged for years in efforts to reduce inappropriate opioid use while ensuring patients have appropriate pain medication. CHA submitted testimony this year on legislation that will further the state's efforts to combat the opioid crisis – Public Act 17-131, An Act Preventing Prescription Opioid Diversion and Abuse.

Among other things, the law increases data sharing between state agencies regarding opioid abuse and opioid overdose deaths, reduces the maximum opioid drug prescription for minors from seven days to five days, allows patients to file a voluntary non-opioid form in their medical records indicating that they do not want to be prescribed or administered opioid drugs, and increases security of controlled substance prescriptions by requiring controlled substances to be prescribed electronically.