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Governor Wolf Outlines Efforts to Fight the Opioid Epidemic in Rural Pennsylvania at Armstrong County Memorial Hospital

Kittanning, PA – Governor Tom Wolf today toured the Armstrong County Memorial Hospital's (ACMH) ER to highlight the region's successful warm handoff program and to discuss his administration's efforts to battle the opioid epidemic, especially in rural Pennsylvania.

The governor was joined by Secretary of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs Jennifer Smith, physicians from Armstrong County Memorial Hospital, and administrators and certified recovery specialists from the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission.

"The concerted efforts of the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion communities to battle the opioid crisis in rural Pennsylvania are evident here in Armstrong County," Gov. Wolf said. "With my administration's opioid disaster declaration, we are aggressively pursuing a multi-agency approach to this epidemic that includes initiatives to address needs in rural Pennsylvania. With Centers of Excellence across the state focused on treatment, the awarding of PA medication-assisted treatment grants, and the standing order for naloxone, we are able to reach Pennsylvanians in all areas of the state to help in this ongoing battle that we must keep fighting."

"We know that the opioid epidemic does not discriminate and often times rural areas are hit the hardest," said DDAP Secretary Jen Smith. "The work being done through Armstrong's warm handoff program connects individuals throughout rural communities to necessary and essential treatment programs. We look forward to working with the county to ensure individuals have access to supports and services regardless of where they live."

The area's Addiction Recovery Mobile Outreach Team (ARMOT) is actively working to connect those who suffer an opioid overdose with treatment via a warm handoff program to receive immediate care at Armstrong County Memorial or other area hospitals, or the program's "warm line," which connects overdose survivors who refuse ER care with a certified recovery specialist who can arrange for an appropriate treatment program within 24 hours of an overdose reversal.

"On behalf of ACMH Hospital and the local community, we commend Governor Wolf for his focus and effort on the drug crisis in Pennsylvania," said John I. Lewis, President/CEO, ACMH. "It is a monumental task; but together, the medical community and the Governor's office are proving we can make a difference in reducing opioid-related deaths."

“We are very delighted that Governor Wolf has taken time out of his busy schedule to visit our warm hand-off program at the Armstrong County Memorial Hospital,” Kami Anderson, Executive Director of the Armstrong-Indiana-Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission said. “The Commission is proud to collaborate with ACMH, first responders, local treatment providers, and Coroner Brian Myers to decrease fatal overdoses and help persons get into treatment immediately. All three of our counties are seeing decreases in the fatal overdose rates.”

Of the 750 patients referred to the ARMOT program since 2015, more than 70 percent were referred to and went directly into treatment. The program has distributed more than 4,200 naloxone kits to first responders, treatment providers, family members, schools and colleges, and any interested community members. While Armstrong County overdose deaths reached 40 in 2016 and stayed at that level in 2017, through June 2018, fatal overdoses have totaled three – a result of this area’s concerted efforts to help those suffering from opioid use disorder.

Since Governor Wolf first signed the heroin and opioid disaster declaration in January, 14 state agencies have formed the Opioid Command Center, meeting weekly to coordinate efforts and to plan and implement [initiatives](#) that are making a difference in this fight.

“My administration is focused with an all-hands-on-deck approach to this crisis and we will continue to fight with the help of partners across Pennsylvania,” Gov. Wolf said.

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