



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Prescription Pain Medication Abuse and Misuse educational sessions begin today**

This week, over 350 health professionals will join health leaders from across the region in helping to curb the growing problem of prescription pain medication abuse and misuse through their participation in “Addressing Prescription Pain Medication Abuse and Misuse – A Framework for Safe Prescribing” educational sessions that begin today in Sarasota. These sessions are targeted to those prescribing or dispensing prescription medications.

A national leader in the field and medical director of PainEDU.org, keynote speaker Kevin Zacharoff, M.D. travels across the U.S. equipping medical professionals with evidenced-based tools and resources to facilitate safe prescribing of pain medications.

Today’s educational session was met with great interest as Dr. Zacharoff highlighted the scope of the prescription drug problem, both nationally and locally. His presentation centered around the universal precautions for pain management, and he emphasized a number of standardized tools which can be used in clinical practice to assess risk for addiction and monitor patients who take pain medication on a regular basis. Dr. Zacharoff underscored the need for clear, effective communication and provided tips to help health care providers identify and address drug-seeking behavior. His remarks were followed by a panel discussion with local law enforcement and addiction experts.

Free continuing medical education (CME) and continuing education (CE) credits are being provided today by [Sarasota Memorial Health Care System](#). Additional workshops are planned this week in Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch and in Port Charlotte with CME credits being provided by [Blake Medical Center](#), [Manatee Memorial Hospital](#), and [Fawcett Memorial Hospital](#).

The local [MetLife](#) of Sarasota and Fort Myers is the sponsor of these health care provider education forums. “As a company, MetLife has a long-standing history of community involvement and social responsibility, as well as supporting causes that promote healthy living,” says Marlene Campana, director of marketing. Additional funding support is being provided by the Department of Children and Families’ Substance Abuse Program Office through Florida State University’s Florida Center for Prevention Research.

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This effort is part of the regional [SafeRx - Campaign for Responsible Prescriptions](#) launched in late January by the health leaders from 12 hospitals and four health departments in Charlotte, DeSoto, Manatee and Sarasota counties. As a united front, they are addressing the misuse/abuse of prescription drugs which has been described as the most threatening substance abuse issue in the State of Florida and is responsible for seven Floridian deaths a day.

“Last week, the White House released a comprehensive action plan to address the national prescription drug abuse epidemic. Their key recommendations -- supporting education for patients and healthcare providers; reducing the prevalence of pill mills; and recommending secure, more convenient, and environmentally responsible disposal methods to remove expired, unused, or unneeded medications from the home – are strategies that our regional health leaders, law enforcement and addictions experts are already working on,” says Kari Ellingstad, director of the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP).

The Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) has spearheaded this four-county multi-healthcare organization collaboration 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 Safe Rx forums or other related initiatives, visit [www.SafeRxFlorida.org](http://www.SafeRxFlorida.org).

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## Quotes from Regional Leaders

### Manatee County

#### [Manatee Glens](#)

"These sessions will provide local physicians with the latest medical strategies and recommendations to 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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