



## NEWS RELEASE

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**Media Note:** A listing of the times/dates and locations of the education offerings is at the end of this release. Keynote speaker and national leader in the field Dr. Kevin Zacharoff will be available for interviews immediately prior to each presentation.

## Addressing Prescription Pain Medication Abuse and Misuse

As part of a regional strategy to address the growing problem of prescription drug abuse and misuse, health leaders will kick-off a series of free 1 ½ hour medical education programs beginning Tuesday, April 26 and continuing through Friday, April 29 in Charlotte, Manatee and Sarasota Counties.

The sessions will provide medical professionals with evidenced-based tools and resources for safe prescribing to help them in their practice. A national leader in the field, Kevin Zacharoff, M.D. will be the keynote speaker. Dr. Zacharoff has a background in clinical anesthesiology and pain medicine and is the Medical Director of [PainEDU.org](http://PainEDU.org). Topics to be addressed include universal precautions for pain management, monitoring patients on opioid therapy, identifying potentially deviant drug-related behavior, and protecting the clinical practice. A 30-minute panel discussion with local law enforcement and addiction experts will follow as a way to help medical providers connect patients in need to community resources.

Free continuing medical education (CMEs) and continuing education (CE) credits will be provided by [Blake Medical Center](#), [Fawcett Memorial Hospital](#), [Lakewood Ranch Medical Center](#) and [Sarasota Memorial Health Care System](#).

The intent is not to create negative outcomes for the legitimate patient, such as the under-treatment of his or her pain. "These sessions will provide local physicians with the latest medical strategies and recommendations to respond to this epidemic of pill diversion and abuse," says Mary Ruiz, President/CEO of Manatee Glens.

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.

Since 2007, all substance abuse related Emergency Room (ER) admissions in the four-county region have increased, with opioid-related admissions increasing 25 percent. Prescription drugs accounted for 86 percent of the drugs identified as a cause of death by the District 12 Medical Examiner in 2009.

**“Addressing Prescription Pain Medication Abuse and Misuse: A Framework for Safe Prescribing” – Educational Sessions:**

**Tuesday, April 26, Noon-1:30 p.m.**  
Sarasota Memorial Hospital Auditorium  
1700 Tamiami Trail, Sarasota

**Tuesday, April 26, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
Michaels on East Ballroom  
1212 S. East Ave., Sarasota

**Wednesday, April 27, Noon-1:30 p.m.**  
Lakewood Ranch Medical Center, Conference Room #1  
8330 Lakewood Ranch Blvd, Lakewood Ranch

**Wednesday, April 27, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
Mattison’s Riverside Ballroom  
1200 First Ave. W., Bradenton

**Thursday, April 28, Noon-1:30 p.m.**  
Fawcett Memorial Hospital h2u Center (Promenades Mall)  
3280 Tamiami Trail, Port Charlotte

**Thursday, April 28, 6:30-8 p.m.**  
Charlotte Harbor Yacht Club Ballroom  
4400 Lister St., Port Charlotte

**Friday, April 29, Noon-1:30 p.m.**  
Blake Medical Center , Dolphin/Pelican Room  
2020 59<sup>th</sup> St. W., Bradenton

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.

The medical education sessions include lunch or dinner, depending on the location. The [MetLife](#) office of Sarasota is the sponsor of the physician education forums that are being planned. “As a company, MetLife has a long-standing history of community involvement and social responsibility, as well as supporting causes that promote healthy living. Additional funding support is being provided by the Department of Children and Families’ Substance Abuse Program Office and managed by Florida State University’s Florida Center for Prevention Research.

Pre-registration is required for those who plan to attend. Register at [www.CHIP4Health.org/SafeRxEdu](http://www.CHIP4Health.org/SafeRxEdu) or by calling 941.275.9139.

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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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