

PHARMACY TASK FORCE
A REVIEW OF ITS HISTORY
JANUARY 2006

Mission of the Greater Flint Health Coalition:

- Improve the health status of the residents of Genesee County. Improve the quality and cost effectiveness of the health care system in our community.

In order to best determine what next steps the Pharmacy Task Force should take, it is important to understand why the Pharmacy Task Force became a focal point for the Greater Flint Health Coalition and the work of the Pharmacy Task Force since 1996.

The Pharmacy Task Force first met in February 1996, with Jim Grzegorzcyk, R. Ph., then Director of Pharmacy, Blue Care Network – East Michigan, as chair. Several concurrent community activities led to the formation of the Task Force: General Motors-UAW efforts with community Health Care Initiatives to seek involvement from local leaders, local health carrier collaboration in non-competitive areas and the medical community seeking a forum to share information to make optimal decisions.

The Task Force was formed to improve the health status and quality of life in the community related to pharmaceuticals, to receive recognition by community colleagues as an accessible resource for pharmacy utilization information and related initiative, and to communicate a consistent message to the community from carriers and providers of care. The Task Force’s mission is to “Promote, through collaborative efforts, the achievement of optimal outcomes, value, and satisfaction from the use of pharmaceuticals in the prevention, cure or treatment of disease and symptoms. Efforts of the Greater Flint Health Coalition Pharmacy Task Force seek to ensure appropriate, high quality, and cost effective pharmacy care in the greater Flint area.”

The first Task Force initiative, (1995 – 1997), was educational awareness for patients and physicians related to the bacteria: *Helicobacter Pylori* (*H. pylori*). *H. pylori* is a bacterium in the stomach responsible for peptic ulcer disease. In 1995, this bacterium cost local health plans over \$7.5 million in ambulatory drug expenditures. The majority of these expenses were for maintaining drugs treating gastrointestinal (GI) disorders. Although direct treatment of *H. pylori* is more than 90% effective in reducing and eradicating further drug maintenance, only 10% of area patients with peptic ulcer disease were receiving appropriate treatment at the time.

To spread awareness, the Pharmacy Task Force developed and distributed educational materials about diagnosing and treating *H. pylori*, and conducted

educational presentations for the medical community. In addition, the Task Force designed a study to assess quality-of-life changes in patients who followed an H. pylori eradication regimen. The study was never completed because the Coalition was unable to gain physician support to recruit patients for this initiative.

In February 1998, Bruce Campbell, M.D., then Director of Infectious Diseases at Hurley Medical Center, became Chair of the Pharmacy Task Force. In that same year, to prevent patients from developing antibiotic-resistant infections, the Pharmacy Task Force developed the Antibiotic Resistance and Reduction Project (1998 – present) aimed at reducing the number of antibiotics prescribed for viral illness such as colds and the flu. Acknowledging the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in its national campaign to reduce antibiotic resistance as a critical public health challenge, the Greater Flint Health Coalition (GFHC) produced a mailing that included:

- ◆ An informational letter sent to approximately 300 Genesee County physicians highlighting CDC recommendations. Recommended treatment protocols highlighted included:
 - coughs/colds/runny noses
 - acute uncomplicated bronchitis
 - complicated bronchitis
 - acute sinusitis
 - chronic sinusitis
 - community acquired pneumonia
- ◆ A copy of the CDC's *Judicious Use of Antibiotics Material Order Form*.

The letter accompanying these attachments was signed by the seven Infectious Disease Specialists in Genesee County:

Charles Bodem, M.D. – Genesys Health System
Gregory Forstall, M.D. – McLaren Regional Medical Center
Eyassu Habte-Gabr, M.D. – Hurley Medical Center
Elizabeth Hale, M.D. – Hurley Medical Center
C. Michael Lewis, D.O.
William K. Lo, M.D. – McLaren Regional Medical Center
Laurie Welton, M.D. – McLaren Regional Medical Center

On November 19, 1998, the Flint Journal highlighted the Coalition's antibiotic resistance mailing with a front page article.

In October 1999, the Coalition once again supported the CDC's national campaign to reduce antibiotic resistance for the second consecutive year. The informational packet was mailed to 500 Genesee County physicians and included:

- ◆ An informational letter highlighted CDC recommendations

- The letter was once again signed by the same seven Infectious Disease Specialists from Genesee County from the 1998 mailing
- ◆ An educational brochure about antibiotic resistance and reduction in adults
- ◆ An educational brochure about antibiotic resistance and reduction in children

As follow-up to the antibiotic resistance mailing, a follow-up survey entitled Antibiotic Resistance and Reduction Materials Survey was sent to 561 local office managers whose physicians received the October informational packet. The survey was returned by only 2.5% of those contacted (14 offices), all of which returned a positive responses.

In late 2000, for the third consecutive year, the Coalition supported the CDC's national campaign to reduce antibiotic resistance by mailing the following informational packet:

- ◆ An informational letter sent to nearly 500 Genesee County physicians highlighting CDC recommendations.
 - This letter was once again signed by the same seven Infectious Disease Specialists from Genesee County as the two previous mailings as well as Saqib Hasan, M.D., of Hurley Medical Center.
- ◆ An educational brochure about antibiotic resistance and reduction in adults
- ◆ An educational brochure about antibiotic resistance and reduction in children

In October 2001, John Saalwaechter, M.D., Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, HealthPlus became Chair of the Pharmacy Task Force.

In January 2002, members of the Pharmacy Task Force were informed that the antibiotic resistance letter would not be going out due to timing issues and the lateness of the letter. It was suggested that the Pharmacy Task Force begin working on a different project for the flu season. In September 2002, the Pharmacy Task Force introduced the Cold Pack campaign (2002 – present) – a product distribution project that built on growing awareness of antibiotic misuse. Recognizing the key role physicians have in educating patients on appropriate antibiotic use, the campaign was initiated with the following:

- ◆ A “champion” letter was sent to area physicians introducing the campaign while providing a number of educational materials. The letter was signed by the following individuals:
 - John Saalwaechter, M.D. – Pharmacy Task Force Chair, GFHC
 - Steven Shapiro, D.O. – Vice President of Medical Affairs, Genesys Health System
 - Abd Alghanem, M.D. – President, Genesee County Medical Society
 - Michael Boucree, M.D. – Vice President of Medical Affairs, Hurley Medical Center
 - Lawrence Reynolds, M.D. – Pediatrician, Mott Children’s Health Center

- Edwin Gullekson, M.D. – Vice President of Medical Affairs, McLaren Regional Medical Center
- ◆ Order forms for free Cold Packs were made available for use with patients with viral infections who insisted upon a prescription for an antibiotic to alleviate their symptoms

Thousands of packages of over-the-counter cold medication and other items were distributed to healthcare providers, along with educational materials on antibiotics. By providing the cold packs to their patients, physicians were able to satisfy the psychological need for medication while reducing the possibility of patients developing an antibiotic-resistance infection.

On October 12, 2002 the Flint Journal released a front page article entitled *Doctors hope 'cold pack' will cool requests for antibiotics*. The article highlighted the goals of the Cold Pack Campaign, while providing basic information about antibiotic resistance and the importance of reducing its occurrence.

That year, although more than 17,000 Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network members in Genesee County were diagnosed with acute respiratory infections (usually viral), 54% received antibiotics – down from 60% in 2001.

Also in 2002, the Take One Campaign was introduced by the Pharmacy Task Force. This campaign encourages doctors to prescribe medications in once-daily doses whenever appropriate. The once daily dose can accomplish three goals: it uses healthcare resources more efficiently; it promotes adherence to prescribed drug regimens, and it increases patient satisfaction. To maximize those goals, a list of thirteen commonly utilized medications that can be optimized to one-pill-a-day, along with letters of support from Hurley Medical Center, Genesys Health System, and McLaren Regional Medical Center were distributed to over 650 physicians and 120 pharmacies in Genesee County.

It is estimated the Take One initiative saved over \$500,000 in health related costs from 2003 – 2004. As a result, Take One materials have been distributed around the country to be used as a model on how community-based initiatives can improve people's health and decrease the costs of the healthcare system.

The Pharmacy Task Force also began to discuss developing a Generic Drug Campaign to educate patients on the cost savings and effectiveness of generic drugs. However, implementation of this activity was postponed due to the priority of the Take One and Cold Pack Campaigns and also until reimbursement to the Coalition for implementation of this activity could be confirmed.

In September 2003, the Michigan Association of Health Plans (MAHP) named the Pharmacy Task Force as a Pinnacle Award recipient for its activities related to reducing antibiotic resistance. The MAHP Pinnacle Award recognizes best-practice

initiatives within the State of Michigan related to quality, access, internal administration, clinical disease management, delivery of services programs, and community outreach.

On March 23, 2003 the Pharmacy Task Force held a retreat for its members. During this Retreat, several areas of future focus were proposed: generic drug use, patient safety/poly pharmacy, alcohol use and prescription medications, appropriate prescribing procedures, and complications related to hypertension and other disease co-morbidity (e.g. diabetes/hypertension, heart failure/hypertension, etc.). The Task Force members reached consensus that issues related to hypertension have a significant impact in many areas of health and the healthcare system. Following this meeting, discussion took place regarding the need for an activity related to hypertension to be culturally competent and focus on patient and physician education.

On October 28, 2003, Debbie Harris, the HEARTplus™ Project Director at Faith Access to Community Economic Development (F.A.C.E.D.) proposed the HEARTplus™ Project to the Pharmacy Task Force. The HEARTplus™ Project was a public education initiative designed to raise awareness of the risk of heart disease and an understanding of the preventive measures that can be taken among medically underserved women. During this meeting, the members approved the proposal and agreed to develop a more detailed plan for implementing the project. At the same time, the Coalition was in the process of corresponding with the pharmaceutical representatives on the Task Force to secure funding for supporting the HEARTplus™ Project. Eli Lilly and Company ultimately did not fund the project. The Coalition did, however, receive \$5,000 from AstraZeneca. Those funds were approved for use on non-promotional medical education programs. They were used for an educational video of the Greater Flint Health Coalition.

On July 24 and 25, 2004, the first annual Flint Heart Healthy Weekend took place. Organized by AstraZeneca and the Greater Flint Health Coalition in association with Meijer Pharmacies, this weekend focused on raising awareness about cardiovascular health and reducing the number of Genesee County residents living with undiagnosed hypertension. Free blood pressure screenings were offered at busy locations in and around the Flint community. Medical professionals were available at these locations to counsel patients with hypertension. During the two-day event, almost 700 participants had their blood pressure checked. About 20% were hypertensive. To ensure appropriate follow-up treatment, Coalition representatives were on hand to provide helpful information on accessing the area's healthcare resources. Mayor Donald Williamson endorsed July 24, 2004 as The Flint Heart Healthy Day, helping to ensure the event's success.

In October 2004, it was suggested that the Pharmacy Task Force could continue trying to assist with the HEARTplus™ project. It was also mentioned that because hypertension runs with diabetes and is a part of so many other illnesses, it could

possibly be woven into the other efforts of the Coalition and Pharmacy Task Force. Given this suggestion, it was proposed that the Task Force look at what has previously been discussed with regards to hypertension. This document was produced and distributed to the Task Force. Stephen Skorcz mentioned that the summary was a good reminder to the pharmaceutical companies that they could provide more support to the HEARTplus™ project. There has been no further discussion.

During December 2003 and also December 2004, the Cold Packs were again distributed to Genesee County physicians and community members.

As follow-up to concerns raised at the March 2003 Retreat of the Pharmacy Task Force, a campaign was launched (2004 – present), to minimize the use of medications that are potentially inappropriate for seniors entitled, Seniors, Medications & Safety: A Prescription Safety Campaign for Those Over 65 years Old. During the retreat, it was noted that approximately 4% of people over 65 were receiving inappropriate drugs from their medical providers.

Approximately 10,000 pocket reference guides and wall charts listing the top twenty-five drugs prescribed in Genesee County that are potentially inappropriate for seniors have been made available to doctors, pharmacists, and nursing homes throughout Genesee County.

During a presentation to the Pharmacy Task Force in May 2004, Emma Bissonnette, Regional Manager, Community Health Initiatives, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Mary Eley, Executive Director of the Michigan Antibiotic Resistance Reduction (MARR) Coalition delivered a presentation outlining the MARR Coalition and the activities they proposed for the Pharmacy Task Force. The two activities proposed for the Task Force were:

1) Antibiotic resistance education for elementary aged children. This activity consists of training high school children to deliver an interactive presentation to elementary aged children about “germs”, antibiotic resistance, and overall good health. The guiding principle of this activity is that it is important to teach people early in life about antibiotic resistance, which will eventually produce well informed and well educated adults. Presentations delivered to the elementary aged children would be supervised by a pharmacist or other health professional to answer questions that require expertise beyond that of the trained high school facilitators. The MARR youth program has received national acclaim, receiving the CDC Award for Excellence, and is already being replicated nationally.

2) Continuing Medical Education Module for Physicians. This activity consists of a ½ day continuing education session for physicians about antibiotic resistance.

Both activities, reported by Ms. Bissonnette and Ms. Eley, had already been completely developed by MARR, and were ready to use "off the shelf".

On June 28, 2005 the Pharmacy Task Force approved the decision to move forward with support of the MARR Coalition's Legislative Action Day in Lansing, Michigan as well as with the arrangement of an "Antibiotics and You" presentation in a Flint area school and a training for the Genesys Parish Nurse System. The Legislative Action Day would kick-off the MARR Coalition's five-city tour with a press conference at the State Capitol and would feature information displays about different antibiotic resistance reduction activities from throughout the state.

On September 27, 2005, West Bendle Elementary School in Burton, Michigan was chosen to receive the "Antibiotics and You" presentation and students from the University of Michigan – Flint, School of Nursing attended the presentation in order to complete their training on how to conduct future presentations in the community. Henry Gaines, Chair of the GFHC Board of Directors, was selected to attend the Legislative Action Day event in Lansing, Michigan. During that event, Mr. Gaines was presented with a State of Michigan "Special Tribute" award by Senator Robert Emerson, who signed the tribute along with Governor Jennifer Granholm, recognizing the efforts of the Pharmacy Task Force.

The Cold Packs were again distributed in December 2005 to Genesee County physicians and community members.

In addition to the stated initiatives and their continuation, the Task Force has recently developed the Emergency Health Card Campaign, a patient-focused educational campaign to:

- increase adherence to medications and physician ordered treatments;
- assist with hospital admissions and routine medical appointments;
- ensure accurate administration of medications during emergency situations.

The Pharmacy Task Force's Emergency Health Card is currently being disseminated. As of October 2007, over 40,000 Emergency Health Cards have been distributed.

