

Opioid Stewardship Gains Traction in Kentucky

To combat the opioid epidemic, healthcare organizations across the country are spearheading and facilitating new pain management strategies and opioid stewardship programs.



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One particularly active state is Kentucky where new opioid treatment protocols and stewardship initiatives are being led by National Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) working to drive change to prevent addictions and protect Kentuckians.

CRNAs provide anesthetics to patients in every practice setting, and for every type of surgery or procedure. One practitioner who has become increasingly concerned about opioid addictions is John M. Edwards, III, MS, CRNA, who works at [Baptist Health Lexington](#). For Edwards, the tipping point was [recent research](#) that found “new persistent opioid use” as a common complication following surgery.

“The research was startling, because we are conditioned to think of infection and blood clots (DVT/PE) as common complications—not persistent drug use and abuse,” Edwards said. “It really had an impact on us, especially when you consider that we are practicing in a state and community that have been greatly and negatively impacted by the opioid crisis.”

To prevent these types of complications, Edwards and his colleagues developed a multidisciplinary acute pain service that practices opioid-sparing analgesia with a heavy reliance on ultrasound-guided regional anesthesia (USGRA). These methods allow them to personalize and optimize care for each patient during and following surgery.

“It is a given that patients are going to experience pain during and following surgical procedures, but we have opioid-responsible tools, medications and methods available to us to provide safe and individualized care for each patient. Our patients’ outcomes and recoveries have been optimized, which is helping surgeons and other providers re-think their ‘opioids first’ prescribing patterns for pain management,” Edwards added.

At Baptist, the team is building the Opioid Stewardship Program based on three pillars: **prevent** patients from developing new persistent opioid use; **protect** patients from long-term opioid use and the community from the diversion of opioids that fuel the opioid epidemic; and **educate** patients and communities about the risks of opioids.

As part of the program, Baptist—through financial support from its Foundation—began offering the DisposeRx program of at-home medication disposal packets and patient education in 2019. The packets are distributed through the Meds to Beds program, as well as the hospital’s retail pharmacy.

“Rolling out DisposeRx is one of many facets of our program, and it actually hits on all three of our goals for the program,” said Edwards. “We are making good progress and are eager to continue to spread the word.”



Edwards shares details on their acute surgical pain management program and efforts to educate patients on disposal of unused medications in this [new video](#).

Edwards shared information about the Baptist program with Jana Bailey, CRNA, who is president of the [Kentucky Association of Nurse Anesthetists](#) (KyANA). Bailey and the KyANA board decided to add Opioid Stewardship to their platform for 2020 which was launched last week, garnering media attention including broadcast coverage from outlets including [LEX18 NBC](#), [WAVE 3 NBC](#), and [WBKO ABC](#).

Bailey customized DisposeRx patient engagement materials, and along with donated packets, is working to educate the 1,000+ members of the Association and encourage them to share information even more broadly and specifically to rural pharmacists throughout the state.

“Most of the large retail pharmacies are distributing DisposeRx to patients, but we want to make sure that the smaller, independent pharmacies are aware of this cost-effective packet that is available to them and their patients for medication disposal,” Bailey said.

The DisposeRx team is pleased to support these types of initiatives led by champions such as John and Jana in Lexington and throughout the state. Patients and the broader healthcare community are fortunate to have them and their organizations serving leading the way to help curb the opioid public health crisis.