GNB Community Health Center to take part in opioid research study

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NEW BEDFORD — The Greater New Bedford Community Health Center will be involved in a research study led by Boston Medical Center with the goal of reducing opioid deaths by 40% in some of the most heavily impacted Massachusetts communities in three years.

The approach of the study will be to partner with urban and rural communities to test the impact of Office-Based Addiction Treatment (OBAT) and the deployment of additional interventions. Other research sites outside of the state include the University of Kentucky, Lexington; Columbia University, New York City; and Ohio State University, Columbus.

Rural communities were chosen in Bristol County: Berkley, Dighton and Freetown.

Boston Medical Center was awarded $85 million in funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, part of the National Institutes of Health to lead the study. The study is part of the NIH HEAL (Helping to End Addiction Long-term) initiative, a bold, trans-agency effort to speed scientific solutions to stem the national opioid crisis, according to a news release.

Eight sites will implement OBAT and eight will implement OBAT along with additional programs, such as community education, accelerated access to medication during hospitalization, jail, and detoxification and prevention and intervention programs in communities, schools, and doctor’s offices.

“The opioid crisis in Massachusetts has been devastating, as it has been across the country,” said Jeffrey Samet, chief of General Internal Medicine at BMC and a professor at Boston University School of Medicine, in a news release. “This research study is a major step forward. We will take what we’ve learned at Boston Medical Center and across Massachusetts over the past 20 years and work with our partners to bring those initiatives together to make a serious dent in the overdose death rate. It means pulling out all the stops."

The health center was selected as the anchor agency to serve the Bristol County cluster because it uses OBAT, said Colleen LaBelle, a registered nurse and founder and director of Boston Medical Center’s OBAT Clinic, the largest of its kind if New England, and is part of the research team.

The goal is to get people on evidence-based medication to reduce overdose deaths, she said. The health center already uses Suboxone for treatment. “The cluster area doesn’t really have those resources, LaBelle said, so this can get more people treatment and expand access. It’s also about decreasing stigma, and hopefully impacting people’s lives and changing outcomes, she said.

“I think people know there’s a lot of need in this area,” said Cheryl Bartlett, chief executive officer of the health center. “The more resources we get, the better we can serve the community” she said.

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