

Quality Report Card

Licking Memorial Health Systems



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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE

Increases in Drug Overdose and Suicidal Ideations during Pandemic

The opioid epidemic is an ongoing public health crisis in the United States that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in the 12 months ending in May 2020 – the highest number ever recorded in a single year. Many behavioral health and addiction medicine specialists fear that public health actions taken by state and local governments to slow the spread of the virus have had unintended consequences for those suffering from substance use disorder and behavioral health conditions. Stress, social isolation, and economic upheaval are known triggers for addiction and relapse, and the pandemic has been a significant cause of these issues.

Loneliness and isolation often are contributing factors for substance use disorder. At the onset of the pandemic, treatment centers around the country cancelled in-person support groups due to public health concerns, making it difficult for patients in recovery to continue their treatment and causing some patients to relapse. The closure of restaurants, bars and other gathering places further contributed to social isolation. The CDC reported that 13 percent of individuals began or increased their drug use in order to cope with the stress of the pandemic.

The CDC also reported that synthetic opioids containing fentanyl caused the majority of overdose deaths in the 12 months ending in May 2020 – a 38

percent increase from the previous year. One reason for the increase in deaths may be that as the pandemic interrupted drug supply chains, it caused users to turn to unknown suppliers. In doing so, users risked acquiring counterfeit drugs or stimulants laced with fentanyl, which may have increased the risk of overdose if the substance unknowingly contained the dangerously potent additive.

Help is available to those suffering with substance abuse through Shepherd Hill, the treatment center associated with Licking Memorial Hospital (LMH). In partnership with the Licking County Health Department (LCHD), Shepherd Hill participates in project DAWN (Deaths avoided with Naloxone), Ohio's network of opioid education and naloxone distribution programs. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a medication that can reverse an overdose caused by an opioid drug, such as heroin, fentanyl, or prescription pain medications. When administered during an overdose, naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and quickly restores breathing. Shepherd Hill distributes Narcan kits to their patients and also encourages their family and friends to carry a kit. Individuals may receive free a Narcan kit and information by contacting LCHD at (740) 349-6685.

LMH offers fentanyl testing strips (FTS) at Licking Memorial Urgent Care locations in Newark, Pataskala and Granville as a harm reduction method and to encourage those who use drugs to be proactive in testing their supply. The testing strips

detect the presence of fentanyl in illegal drugs and may help inform users about their risk of fentanyl exposure prior to consumption. Individuals may visit any of the LMH Urgent Care facilities and ask for the strips at the front desk. The test strips are provided with a contact number for Shepherd Hill.

Another concern among behavioral health specialists is the increase of patients suffering from mental health disorders during the pandemic. Mental health is particularly susceptible to traumatic events and the social and economic consequences that result. The pandemic has caused uncertainty, fear, isolation and social disconnectedness, which may lead to increased feelings of depression, anxiety and hopelessness among individuals. Although reports have not indicated an increase of suicides associated with the pandemic, certain groups, such as the elderly, youth and young adults, unemployed, and those with mental health conditions, may be more vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic and experience increased suicide rates. It is important for people to care for themselves and learn to how cope with their stress in healthy ways.

Licking Memorial Behavioral Health Services offers assistance for those experiencing mental health issues. Physician services in general psychiatry are available and include comprehensive assessments, as well as ongoing treatment and medication management when appropriate. The physicians consult with the primary care providers and specialists

Increases in Drug Overdose (continued on back)

Patient Story – Melissa*

For Melissa, the journey to recovery from drug and alcohol addiction has been long and filled with numerous setbacks, but she is celebrating life and a new feeling of hope for her future. After spending nearly two months in a treatment program at Shepherd Hill, Melissa has become a peer support person for others beginning their own journey of recovery. Melissa developed many skills during her time at Shepherd Hill and built a strong support group to assist her when she waivers.

Melissa was born and raised in Newark. At the age of 11, some older cousins she often spent time with offered her alcohol and marijuana, which she tried. By the age of 13, she was addicted to alcohol and began experimenting with other substances. As an adult, Melissa realized her habits were destructive and sought help from several rehabilitation programs. Her life was in turmoil, and she was sent to jail for possession. She had lost custody of her children, had no home and nothing but a backpack filled with some clothing and other small items. When Melissa attempted to stop using drugs, she would feel sick. "I had to have something. I could not function," Melissa said.

Before contacting Shepherd Hill, Melissa had been through a number of other alcohol and drug dependency programs. "I was just so tired of not being able to stay clean. A friend of mine told me about the program at Shepherd Hill. I called and made an appointment, and it changed my life forever," Melissa recalled. At Shepherd Hill, the goal is to match the intensity of treatment with the severity of illness to provide individualized care using the American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) placement criteria. After an evaluation, Melissa was placed in the Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) for substance-use disorders that is offered during daytime and evening hours. Patients live at home while

attending treatment. "Treatment at Shepherd Hill was different than any other program I had been through. The counselors took time to educate us about addiction. I never realized addiction is a disease, and learning about the science behind my condition made it seem more manageable," Melissa shared.

Due to differences in body chemistry, certain people are unable to successfully metabolize mood-altering substances. Clinically referred to as a substance use disorder, addiction is a complex disease of the brain and body that involves compulsive use of one or more substances despite serious health and social consequences. Addiction disrupts regions of the brain that are responsible for reward, motivation, learning, judgment and memory. Melissa experienced a relapse while in the IOP and was then placed in a higher level of care – partial hospitalization with an overnight component. She also was prescribed medication to decrease cravings. Injected once a month and used with counseling, many people suffering from addiction find the medication valuable to staying in recovery.

Shepherd Hill programs focus on teaching patients how to manage their disease through an abstinence-based lifestyle and involvement in 12-step support groups. The primary treatment goals are education, self-diagnosis, self-responsibility and self-treatment. Melissa attended meetings every night and built a sober network – a group of people she can talk with when struggling with urges to drink or take drugs. "They have become like my family, as have the staff at Shepherd Hill, and I cannot survive without them. They really care about the patients and make you feel at home. They saved my life because I wanted to change for them," Melissa shared.

Melissa is now part of an aftercare program. She still attends meetings, meets with her counselor and receives the monthly medication injection. Melissa also spends time with her two children and two grandchildren and works to support herself financially. With her continued success, Melissa has been active in sharing her experience with others battling addiction. At the meetings held at Shepherd Hill, Melissa often serves as Chair and makes a point to speak with new attendees. "The first time you go to a meeting, it can be uncomfortable. You really do not understand the process and what the 12 steps really entail," Melissa explained. "I like to talk with those attending for the first time and let them know they are in a safe place and sobriety is possible."

Shepherd Hill is a nationally accredited treatment center. Patient care units are designed to accommodate patients in comfortable, private surroundings within a campus setting. Patients partake in individual and group therapy, therapeutic activities, daily lectures and continued care planning. Call (220) 564-4325 (HEAL) or visit ShepherdHill.net for immediate assistance.

Shepherd Hill offers the following services:

- Withdrawal management (detoxification)
- Partial hospitalization
- Partial hospitalization with overnight component
- Intensive outpatient treatment
- Aftercare
- Medication-assisted treatment
- Treatment for healthcare professionals
- Psychiatric services
- Educational services and programs

**Melissa is not the patient's real name.*



Behavioral Health Care – *How do we compare?*

At Licking Memorial Health Systems (LMHS), we take pride in the care we provide. To monitor the quality of that care, we track specific quality measures and compare to benchmark measures. Then, we publish the information so you can draw your own conclusions regarding your healthcare choices.

- Behavioral health is a broad term that refers to psychiatric illnesses and/or substance use disorders. Inpatient hospitalization for either condition is often necessary for effective intervention. LMH provides a wide range of services for people with behavioral health illnesses at its Shepherd Hill facility. One goal is to transition patients into outpatient settings where they can continue treatment, decreasing the need for readmission.

	LMH 2018	LMH 2019	LMH 2020	Goal
Psychiatric readmissions within 31 days	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	less than 5.6%

- Outcome studies are conducted to monitor and measure the treatment success of addictive disease. Our data show how patients are doing up to two years after completing the program. Information regarding abstinence one year after completing the program is self-reported by patients.

	LMH 2018	LMH 2019	LMH 2020	Goal
Patients remaining abstinent	97%	98%	96%	greater than 85%
Improvement in quality of relationships	95%	94%	99%	greater than 85%
Improvement in overall physical and mental health	95%	93%	100%	greater than 85%
Improvement in overall quality of life	98%	85%	97%	greater than 85%

- Withdrawal management – the safe, medically supervised elimination of addictive substances from the body – is the most intensive care offered for patients with addictive disease. Acute withdrawal symptoms are managed by the appropriate medications for each patient’s situation. The length of stay for detoxification depends upon the drug of choice and the severity of the withdrawal.

	LMH 2018	LMH 2019	LMH 2020	Goal
Average length of stay – alcohol treatment	2.9 days	2.9 days	2.6 days	less than 3 days
Average length of stay – opiate treatment	2.5 days	1.7 days	1.4 days	less than 4 days
Average length of stay – tranquilizer (benzodiazepines) treatment	2.6 days	1.0 days	2.2 days	less than 5 days

- Education is considered an essential component of providing complete behavioral health care. A thorough understanding of the diagnosis, the purpose of medications, side effects to medications and the expected response to treatment leads to decreased relapse and readmission rates and increased long-term compliance with medication on an outpatient basis.

	LMH 2018	LMH 2019	LMH 2020	Goal
Diagnosis/disease education provided for patients and/or family	100%	100%	100%	greater than 97%
Medication education provided for patients and/or family	99.9%	99.5%	100%	greater than 97%

- Family participation is an important component in patients’ recovery. For continuity of care, a licensed professional clinical counselor or social worker will initiate contact with family members of Shepherd Hill psychiatric inpatients and encourage them to participate in a family meeting during the period of inpatient treatment.

	LMH 2018	LMH 2019	LMH 2020	Goal
Social work/family meeting during patient stay	98%	98%	97%	greater than 95%

- (Due to telehealth visits and concerns about COVID-19, fewer patients visited Licking Memorial Behavioral Health to have blood testing.)* Valproic acid and lithium are two common medications used to treat multiple behavioral health diagnoses. These medications can facilitate control of symptoms and assist in recovery, but both have potentially dangerous side effects. Licking Memorial Behavioral Health professionals monitor their patients’ blood at specified intervals to ensure therapeutic levels of the medications and to observe for toxicity or other negative effects on vital organs.

	LMHP 2018	LMHP 2019	LMHP 2020	Goal
Appropriate testing complete for patients taking lithium (such as Lithobid)	95%	100%	75%*	greater than 90%
Appropriate testing complete for patients taking valproic acid (such as Depakote)	93%	100%	88%*	greater than 90%

*Due to telehealth visits and concerns about COVID-19, fewer patients visited Licking Memorial Behavioral Health to have blood testing.

and make referrals to individual or group therapy when needed. Adult inpatient psychiatric services also are available. Inpatient hospitalization is primarily acute crisis intervention with an emphasis on strengthening the individual's coping

skills. The program is staffed by a team of licensed professionals, including psychiatrists, registered nurses, clinical social workers, professional counselors and occupational therapists. Treatment may include individual and group therapies.

Education in community resources, communication skills, stress management, coping skills, relaxation techniques, social skills, and medication management are offered.

Warning Signs of Drug Relapse

Addiction is a chronic disease, and a relapse can happen to a person in recovery at any time, regardless of how long they have abstained from drug use. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), individuals recovering from addiction often have at least one relapse. They may feel guilt or shame, and continuing on the path of recovery may be difficult. It is important to note that relapse is a part of the recovery process and does not mean that treatment has failed. Returning to treatment as quickly as possible after a relapse happens is crucial to a person's recovery and long-term health.

Common triggers for drug relapse include depression, stress, exhaustion and isolation, and the current pandemic has been a contributing factor for these triggers. Relapses can be dangerous, especially for individuals who have not used drugs in a long time. A person's tolerance for a drug diminishes over time, and if they take the amount that they were accustomed to using during the height of their substance use, it could result in an overdose and even death.

There are three stages of relapse:

- Emotional relapse – this first stage of relapse occurs when a person experiences negative behaviors, such as anger, irritability or anxiousness. Eating and sleeping habits may become erratic, and they may stop

seeking help from their support system.

- Mental relapse – in this stage, an individual begins an internal struggle with themselves. They are committed to recovery, but a part of them also wants to return to using. They may experience feelings of irritability and distraction. Individuals usually have deliberate thoughts about using again in this stage.
- Physical relapse – this final stage occurs when an individual breaks their sobriety and returns to drug use. This stage is most often associated with the term relapse.

Recognizing the warning signs of a relapse may prevent a person from returning to substance abuse. Common signs that a person may relapse include:

- Romanticizing drug use – Individuals may reminisce about the positive experiences they had while using drugs. It is easy for a person with addiction to remember the pleasant times of their abuse and forget the negative feelings.
- Thoughts of using drugs casually – A person may believe that they can use drugs without slipping back into addiction based on what they have learned in their recovery program.
- Engaging in negative environments – Individuals may visit past relationships and surroundings that involve drug use during a time when they are vulnerable to such influences.

- Sudden changes in behavior – A person in recovery may begin to isolate themselves from others and avoid contact with their support system.
- Expressions of doubt – An evident sign of relapse is when a person in recovery begins to doubt the effectiveness of their recovery process or disparage the treatment program.

Individuals in recovery who notice any of the above signs of relapse should notify their therapist or sponsor immediately about their behavior. Trusted friends and family members also can be a helpful support system. People who notice the signs of relapse in a loved one or a friend should encourage them to reach out to their therapist or sponsor for help.

It is important for people who relapse to be kind to themselves and recognize that their relapse is not a failure, but a process in recovery. Feelings of guilt and disgrace can make returning to sobriety more difficult. Keeping in regular contact with a person's therapist, sponsor, family and friends can help reduce the possibility of a relapse.

Licking Memorial Health Systems offers inpatient and outpatient services for addiction and behavioral health through Shepherd Hill, a nationally accredited treatment center located in Newark. To find out more about addiction medicine, call (220) 564-4325 (HEAL).



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Visit us at LMHealth.org.

Please take a few minutes to read this month's report on **Behavioral Health Care**. You will soon discover why Licking Memorial Health Systems is measurably different ... for your health!

The Quality Report Card is a publication of the LMHS Public Relations Department. Please contact the Public Relations Department at (220) 564-1572 to receive future mailings.

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