

STEP - Stretching To EmPower

Stretching to empower, empowered in the stretching...

The overarching goal of the STEP program is to prevent opioid misuse among the underserved population of women across the lifespan who reside in Allegany County public housing, and to intervene on behalf of those who exhibit a potential or existing indication of misuse and/or addiction.

- One of 16 projects nationwide approved in July, 2017 by the Office on Women's Health (a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) to address the primary and/or secondary prevention of prescription and non-prescription opioid misuse by women across the lifespan in underserved populations. STEP seeks to strengthen participants in mind, body and spirit against opioid misuse and addiction
- Three-year grant, \$100,000 per year
- Three main components of STEP: Yoga, Opioid Education, and Community Health Worker oversight

Trauma Sensitive Yoga

- Listed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) on the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices
- A psychosocial group intervention for adults affected by traumatic stress, which incorporates yoga principles and practices. In trauma sensitive yoga, elements of traditional hatha yoga are modified to maximize tolerance, build trauma survivors' experiences of empowerment, and cultivate a more positive relationship to one's body.
- To be conducted by a trauma-certified yoga instructor over 10 weekly hour-long sessions, twice per year. Program to be developed in conjunction with Allegany College of Maryland faculty certified by the Center for Mind-Body Medicine to foster relationship-centered approaches that build individual resilience

Opioid Education

- To be provided in 30-minute segments prior to the hour-long yoga session; yoga as the "dessert" to follow the educational "vegetables"
- Curriculum to be developed in conjunction with Behavioral Health/Addictions unit of the Allegany County Health Department, whose staff noted that the program's focus on prevention requires an educational approach dedicated to "*Front end, front end, front end,*" ie, before misuse or addiction occurs.
- Possible topics for the 10 weekly sessions include: * General education on opioids, physical and psychological effects; * Chronic pain management; * How to talk to your children about pills and attendant hazards; * Health literacy; * "Food as medicine"; * Review of available services at Health Department/Tri State Community Health Center; * Stigmatization, including fear of criminalization and stigma associated with opioid abuse as well as "Good Samaritan" laws related to opioid overdose situations (to be provided by law enforcement partners)

Community Health Worker

The STEP program will be conducted by a Community Health Worker (CHW). A growing part of the U.S. healthcare workforce, CHWs serve as a knowledgeable, compassionate, and engaged bridge between patient and provider. CHWs encourage communication to ensure patient-centered care and shared decision making, work to ensure that treatment regimens are followed, and help link patients to social service and other support networks. Use of the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) screening protocol by the CHW will help identify those at risk of misuse.

Significantly, **the STEP CHW will work with participants year-round**, beyond the two 10-week yoga sessions. The CHW will essentially be "on call" to help participants with any healthcare related problems they have, beyond opioid related issues. In this capacity the CHW will serve not only as participants' advocate but as their champion.

Also ... Connectedness

Finally, STEP seeks to strengthen participants against the risks of opioid misuse by drawing them out of their residences and pulling them together, fostering socialization that will promote the interpersonal connections that can help prevent destructive behavior such as opioid misuse. To help maintain these connections, the program will feature intervening sessions on chronic pain management, alternative therapies, and other topics of interest.