

Letter to the editor: History is as important as the drug problem

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By Freddie Jaquez

In an effort to do good for the San Luis Valley, the **San Luis Valley Area Health Education Center (SLVAHEC)** has partnered in the task of addressing the community concern on prescription drug addiction and abuse. In a meeting last Wednesday August 21, 2013, I presented an update of the project conducted by the SLVAHEC, which completed on August 8, 2013, entitled "Prescription Drug Addition and Abuse - A Collaborative Approach to Creating Policy for Addressing the Problem in the San Luis Valley." **I told the audience that there was a community concern which needed to be addressed in our valley, prescription drug addiction and abuse.** The meeting was covered by Valley Courier reporter Lauren Krizansky.

Before I told the audience where work was headed, I told them that it was very important that they have an historical perspective of how and why the SLVAHEC got involved in the first place. The following is truly important for the reader to know as it was never mentioned in the newspaper article, an article which was very hurtful to our local health care community.

On November 28, 2012, the SLVAHEC attended the narcotics committee meeting at the San Luis Valley Health Education and Conference Center. This meeting was attended by representatives from San Luis Valley Health, Rio Grande Hospital, Valley Wide Health Systems and SLV Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center. This group, co-chaired by Dr. Sarah McAlpine of SLV Health and Dr. Amy Carpenter of Valley Wide Health Services had been meeting for months before the SLVAHEC joined the group. The work these representatives were performing was nothing short of historical. They were developing a document which, when finally implemented, would immediately address the relationship between provider and patient regarding the parameters of how pain medicine would now be prescribed. Certainly, this document would allow providers to manage patients' need for such medicine much more realistically. Numerous meetings and time on this matter by our local physicians, physician assistants, nurse family practioners and other health care professionals was dedicated to this pressing task. **The document was developed to be utilized as a uniform pain management agreement among all San Luis Valley health care facilities. This is truly historical.**

This group of health care providers also developed uniform prescription drug guidelines to be utilized by all San Luis Valley health care organizations. This was an amazing feat and demonstration of unity among our health care organizations. I am very proud of our San Luis Valley providers who worked tirelessly for months, drafted and developed these two needed documents which will, as I mentioned, immediately begin addressing our communities' prescription drug concerns.

None of this work would have taken place without the hard work of our local doctors, PA's, NFP's and others through the narcotics committee. The tragedy of this article: None of this was reported by the Valley Couier at last week's meeting through the article "Valley stands up to prescription drug abuse." The provider members of the task force were not recognized for their efforts. I do not blame them for feeling discounted. The article makes it seem as though the SLVAHEC was responsible for this great work. The SLVAHEC was not responsible for this work which led to the subsequent convenings on this problem. The credit for the work leading to the dialogues carried out recently must truly go to our professional health care providers. Without them, our recent convenings would never have taken place. I also want to apologize for the unfortunate statement that "Our doctors don't know how to wean them off (narcotics)." Our community of healthcare providers is knowledgeable in the care of opioid dependent patients within the constraints of the available resources.

As director of the SLVAHEC, I truly apologize to our local health care providers for not receiving your due credit for your hard work in addressing the concern of prescription drugs in the San Luis Valley. I am proud of our San Luis Valley health care providers as you are second to none. The SLVAHEC will always support you.

Freddie L. Jaquez