

# **DUTCHESS COUNTY TO HOST FORUM ON PRESCRIPTION DRUG & OPIATE ABUSE**

*Monday, May 19<sup>th</sup> at Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie*

Poughkeepsie, NY...In a collaborative effort, Dutchess County Executive Marcus Molinaro, the Dutchess County Legislature, and the Health and Human Services Cabinet will host a "Community Forum on Prescription Drug and Opiate Abuse" on Monday, May 19<sup>th</sup> from 6:30 - 8:30 pm at Locust Grove in Poughkeepsie. The public is encouraged to attend this important event to learn about how they can prevent and/or treat substance abuse, particularly opiate abuse.

"The escalating crisis of opiate use and its effect on our county residents and criminal justice system cannot be ignored. That is why last year I formed a subcommittee of the Health and Human Services Cabinet to specifically work together to identify ways to improve and enhance how Dutchess County is responding to this epidemic. This forum is yet another way members of this subcommittee and agents of County Government are working to provide information about all the programs and services that are available to assist addicts and their loved ones. Hopefully the forum will help to facilitate more a community dialogue, which is key to addressing this growing concern," said County Executive Molinaro.

"This forum is important to help the community understand how bad this epidemic really is and how we can work together to address it. Heroin and prescription drug abuse is not an isolated issue. It is found in every town, village and city across the County and impacts every socioeconomic group. I applaud the work of the Health and Human Services Cabinet in seeking ways to more comprehensively address this crisis and partnering with community leaders, nonprofits and elected officials," said Angela E. Flesland, Majority Leader, Dutchess County Legislature.

The goal of the May 19<sup>th</sup> forum is to help understand the extent of the problem, increase awareness, share information on addiction behavior and treatment opportunities, and offer messages of hope to prevent and/or treat addiction. Clinicians, prevention educators, community members, and public safety and elected officials will be among the participants. Personal stories will be shared from multiple perspectives, including a parent who has suffered the loss of their child to addiction and a former addict who continues successfully in recovery.

Dutchess County has seen an increase in prescription painkiller and heroin overdoses over the past decade that mirrors the national trend. "The widespread use of opioid narcotics has generated an epidemic of addiction and become a serious public health concern," says Dr. Kari Reiber, Dutchess County Commissioner of Health. "Sadly, addiction is a disease that is spreading throughout our community, causing more deaths every year than vehicular accidents. Like many other diseases, addiction is preventable and amenable to treatment; our mission is to

provide the tools to better understand the disease and how it can be prevented, and help those suffering from addiction get access to effective treatment.”

“This forum is an important opportunity for the community to engage with health providers, law enforcement, and elected officials to continue our conversation on how together we can implement an effective prevention program, provide access to treatment and support long term recovery for those individuals who suffer from the disease of addiction in Dutchess County,” said Margaret Hirst from the Dutchess County Department of Mental Hygiene.

“Monday’s event will help to provide some of the information and tools necessary to both prevent and treat prescription and opiate misuse and abuse. It’s a program designed at all segments of the community,” said Mary Kaye Dolan, Chair of the Health & Human Services Cabinet – a group of County Government department heads that work together to discuss issues and share ideas related to public/mental health; social welfare programs; services for veterans, the elderly and youth; and other family-oriented assistance programs.

Raising public awareness was one of the many strategies highlighted in the report on prescription drug abuse issued by the Health and Human Services Cabinet to the County Executive in December 2013. Prescription drug abuse is identified as one of the top four health priorities in the recently released Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) and is also a priority focus in the Local Governmental Plan for Mental Health, Chemical Dependency and Developmental Disabilities. These reports are available on Dutchess County’s website at [www.dutchessny.gov](http://www.dutchessny.gov).

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