

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

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June 21, 2017

The Honorable Robert C. Fracchia
Presiding Judge
Solano County Superior Court
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

RE: Response to 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report Entitled: **Opioid Risks in Solano County**

The Honorable Robert C. Fracchia, Presiding Judge of the Solano County Superior Court:

Under Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, I am responding to the following findings and recommendations contained in the 2016-2017 Grand Jury Report, Opioid Risks in Solano County that pertain to matters under my control as Director of Health and Social Services

Finding 2 – Solano County Health & Social Services Department lacks a coordinated response to the problem of opioid related deaths.

Finding 2 Response – I disagree partially with this finding. The matter of opioid use and misuse involves multiple community partners and various interventions to address. A number of Divisions within Health & Social Services have various involvements related to opioid misuse and deaths, including: the Vital Statistics Unit in Public Health, Behavioral Health services when active treatment and care management is taking place, and Family Health Services, if Primary Care or Emergency Medical Services (EMS) are being provided.

The Department has recently begun to implement a mortality review process on all deaths in which some aspect of services has been provided to the deceased. The goal of these reviews is to determine best approaches to avoid preventable deaths in the future by examining best practices and coordination in service delivery.

Recommendation 2 – Solano County Department of Health & Social Services performs a collaborative inter-agency review of deaths involving opioids.

Recommendation 2 Response – The recommendation has been implemented as reflected in my response to Finding 2.

Finding 3 – Solano County Department of Health & Social Services and the Solano County Sheriff-Coroner's Office failure to collaborate and utilize accurate and timely data on opioid deaths precludes these agencies from taking coordinated actions to control and mitigate the harm caused by opioids in our community.

Finding 3 Response – I disagree partially with this finding. As we informed the Grand Jury in our comments to your draft report in April, 2017 if this refers to a difference in the number of opioid-related deaths reported by the Coroner's Office vs. Public Health's Vital Statistics Program, then this is likely due to the fact that the Coroner's Office does not receive notice of all opioid-related deaths in the County, many of which occur in community healthcare facilities, so the number recorded on death certificates may be higher.

Further, with reference to the section “Opioid provider professional responsibility and due diligence,” we remain uncertain as to how the Grand Jury obtained the number 0 for CURES database inquiries during 2015 by Solano County prescribers and pharmacies. We are not sure that type of data can actually be obtained from the CURES 1.0 database. As of mid-2017, all physicians in California are required to be registered with CURES.

Recommendation 3b – Solano County Department of Health & Social Services and the Solano County Sheriff-Coroner’s Office, collaboratively engage the Solano County Board of Supervisors to consider the establishment of a task force that will combine the expertise of the District Attorney, the Coroner, The Public Health Officer and the Office of Education to establish a program to monitor and investigate deaths, identify recurring risk factors and take positive steps to address the harm caused by opioids within our community.

Response to Recommendation 3b – The recommendation has been implemented. The Department engaged the Board of Supervisors, and is participating in a workgroup being led by Partnership Health- Plan of California, to consider the development of such a group. There is still a need to assure the following Departments are all involved with such a workgroup or task force:

- Health & Social Services Department: Behavioral Health and Public Health Divisions
- District Attorney’s Office
- Sheriff-Coroner’s Office
- Solano County Office of Education

Finding 4 – The Solano County Department of Health & Social Services does not use the CURES database to detect, dissuade, and deter, high-risk opioid prescribing patterns or identify drug-seeking behavior.

Response to Finding 4 – I disagree partially with this finding and note that all physicians in California will be required to be registered with CURES by mid-2017. At that time, there will be more reliable data reporting into CURES to do better monitoring and interventions to deter high-risk opioid use. Our psychiatric providers are all enrolled in CURES. As the state moves to mandatory CURES lookup, we will be in compliance with that. In the interim, our providers are aware that it is a best practice, and have been educated on the use of this resource. We also review for this activity as part of the physician peer review of records

Recommendation 4 – The Solano County Department of Health & Social Services monitor Solano County providers and dispensers use the CURES database.

Response to Recommendation 4 – This recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented if and when this reporting becomes feasible with CURES 2.0.

Finding 5 – The 2016-2017 Solano County Grand Jury has found that Solano County lacks a continuous year-round program to recover unused prescription medications from the more than 28,000,000 pills of Schedule II opioids dispensed within our communities during 2015.

Response to Finding 5 – I disagree partially with this finding. The Grand Jury found that “Solano County’s drug-take back events collected 4,214 pounds of prescription medications at eleven events in 2015.” We are exploring options to expand the collection of unused prescription medications on a year-round basis.

Recommendation 5 – Solano County Department of Health & Social Services establish an effective year-round prescription drug take-back program.

Response to Recommendation 5 – This recommendation requires further analysis. Currently, the drug take-back activities are overseen by the Solano County Sheriff’s Office and the Department of Resource Management, Environmental Services. We will discuss the scope and parameters of this recommendation with the Sheriff’s Office, the Department of Resource Management and County Administrator’s Office.

Thank you for the report on opioid risks and prescription drug deaths in Solano County, dated April 27, 2017. I also wish to thank the Grand Jury for allowing the Health & Social Services Department to review your draft report on this topic back in April 2017, and to offer our initial comments.

Respectfully,



Gerald R. Huber
Director

Encl.: H&SS Corres. (2 Pgs.)-Dtd. 4-13-17 to Grand Jury RE: "Opioid Risks to Solano County"

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