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10-27-2021

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**October 27, 2021**

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## **Reducing Opioid Deaths is Focus of Professor's NIH Study**

**CEDARVILLE, OHIO** -- While the world has grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years, Cedarville University professor [Dr. Brenda Pahl](#) has been working as part of a National Institutes of Health (NIH) program to help combat a much older medical problem — the opioid crisis — which isn't always as visible, yet it continues to claim victims throughout the nation.

Pahl, an assistant professor of pharmacy practice in the [school of pharmacy](#), is part of a state-wide initiative that addresses the opioid crisis. Pahl's role is to help facilitate the NIH's HEALing Communities Study in Greene County, therefore, reduce the growing number of deaths caused by the misuse of opioids.

Pahl was first connected to the study due to her involvement in the Greene County Drug-Free Coalition, which she joined after coming to Cedarville in 2015, and her experience as a practicing pharmacist. When the University of Cincinnati, one of the NIH partner institutions in Ohio, reached out to the coalition for recommendation of healthcare professionals who would bring expertise to the project, Pahl's name was given as a resource for Greene County.

As part of her work with the study, Pahl has focused on safer prescribing and dispensing initiatives. She brought in Dr. Jon Sprague, the director of the Ohio Attorney General's Center for the Future of Forensic Science at Bowling Green State University, to educate other pharmacists on this issue. In August, they offered a live continuing education session via zoom for pharmacists in Greene County, where Cedarville University is located. Any Greene County pharmacists interested in a recording of that session can reach out to Pahl at [bpahl@cedarville.edu](mailto:bpahl@cedarville.edu).

"When we went to pharmacy school in the past, substance misuse wasn't something that was really taught or talked about," Pahl said. "We're educating more pharmacists on what substance use disorder is."

Pahl and Sprague are teaching pharmacists to understand that while opioids have an important role in pain management, there are alternatives, and there are situations where pharmacists can recommend that the physician prescribe another drug. They are also equipping pharmacists to fully explain the risks, benefits and side effects of opioids. Finally, they are focusing on ways that medications can be disposed of more responsibly, because many overdoses happen when people find leftover prescriptions in the medicine cabinets of friends and family members.

In addition to educating pharmacists, the Greene County Drug-Free Coalition has used funds from the study to support patients with substance use disorder by providing resources for treatment and recovery.

Ohio, which is one of four states included in the study, has long had a problem with opioid overdoses, at one point being one of the top states for opioid deaths. Montgomery County, in particular, was a major

center of overdoses in the state. While deaths caused by the opioid epidemic started to decrease after 2017, the numbers have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

The NIH HEALing Communities Study started in 2020 and will run through 2022. Once it's done, Pahl said that the NIH will look at what various counties did to see how well their strategies worked at reducing opioid deaths.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,715 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the [Doctor of Pharmacy program](#), strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit [cedarville.edu](http://cedarville.edu).

Written by Bryson Durst.