



Notes from the Chief

What I'm working on for You

Osiyo -

Prescription drug abuse is rampant in Oklahoma, with abusers being identified at younger and younger ages. Oklahoma ranks in the top 10 nationally of overdoses and deaths related to opioid abuse. Additionally, Indian Health Service reports that opioid abuse-related deaths among tribal populations is almost double the general population.

Opioid painkillers like oxycodone, hydrocodone and hydromorphone account for about 75 percent of prescription drug overdose deaths. We have a crisis in Oklahoma and throughout Indian Country, and we must raise awareness of the issue and create sustainable prevention plans for families, schools and community organizations. It's important our Cherokee Nation youth know the importance of not only physical health, but mental health. That's why we are striving to ensure Cherokee Nation citizens are healthy and safe.

Our tribe's behavioral health department has prevention coordinators who are working to secure drop bags at area pharmacies with important information on safe use, safe storage and safe disposal of prescription drugs. The safe drop off bags and locations get no longer needed drugs out of medicine cabinets and homes. On one recent Saturday afternoon in Wagoner, our team collected more than 3,000 pills for disposal and distributed lockboxes for families to keep dangerous and addictive painkillers away from children.

This effort is a partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, as well as the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Our tribal marshals are also part of a new project the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the IHS and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy have instituted. The BIA is training officers to recognize opioid overdoses and be authorized to dispense a dose of naloxone, which can reverse an opioid

overdose by counterbalancing the drug's slowing of the victim's nervous and respiratory systems.

This is a national pilot program, and we are proud to be involved along with other tribal officers in Oklahoma. After the training, our Cherokee Nation marshals will be better equipped to identify and divert overdoses, which will save lives.

We need a comprehensive response to this problem. We've addressed education with pharmacies and equipped our law enforcement officers with better information and tools to deal with prescription drug abuse within our 14-county tribal jurisdictional boundaries. In addition to education, we must ensure addiction treatment is available to the thousands of people who need it.

Addiction and the escalating rate of overdoses are a simple matter of life and death. We are taking a serious look at how we can best help our citizens to break the cycle of abuse. I hope you will join me in this effort.

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Bill John Baker



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