House Bill 4 – Expanding Access to Naloxone in Ohio

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Background
Ohio is in the midst of an opioid epidemic, with nearly six Ohioans dying of a drug overdose every day. Drug overdose has become the leading cause of injury death both in Ohio and across the nation since 2007—surpassing deaths from motor vehicle crashes for the first time on record. The Ohio Department of Health has reported that almost 75% of those deaths involve opioids such as heroin or prescription painkillers. As physicians, it is vital that we engage our patients in conversations about addressing their substance use disorder with safer prescribing of opioid pain medications, treatment for substance use disorder and overdose prevention and education. One additional tool that we have is a drug that we have been using for years in the hospital—naloxone.

Naloxone has traditionally only been available to patients when administered to them by a paramedic or a physician in the hospital by injection. Over the past several years, programs across the country have been providing patients access to this life-saving drug to use at home as a nasal spray or an auto injector to rescue an individual experiencing an overdose. In Ohio, Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided With Naloxone) provides this service. Since 2012, Project DAWN has been providing overdose education and naloxone overdose prevention kits in over 25 counties in Ohio at more than 50 locations statewide.

Naloxone Access
While Project DAWN has greatly expanded access to naloxone to at-risk individuals since 2012, several barriers continue to limit access. In 2013, Ohio first passed legislation to increase access to naloxone by allowing police to carry and administer naloxone, as well as family and friends of individuals who are at-risk for overdose. This was the initial step in improving access to the antidote. This past July, Ohio took the next step in fighting this epidemic, allowing even greater access to naloxone. On July 17, Governor Kasich signed House Bill 4 into law, allowing naloxone to be made available by trained individuals and pharmacists authorized by a physician under a standing order protocol to dispense naloxone to individuals who are either at personal risk for opioid overdose or who may be in a position to rescue someone who is having an overdose. In practice, this means that any person can obtain naloxone without seeing a physician by either walking into a Project DAWN distribution site or visiting a participating pharmacy. This legislation even allows physicians to authorize an individual to dispense naloxone under protocol at any location that holds a terminal distributor license.

What this Means for Physicians and Patients
This means that your patients will have greater access to naloxone than ever before. As a physician, you can develop a protocol in your own practice to allow staff to train and dispense naloxone to at-risk individuals or refer them to a program or location that offers the service. This means that your patients will be safer and more likely to survive their overdose and receive treatment for addiction with passage of House Bill 4. To learn more, read about Project DAWN at www.metrohealth.org/projectdawn.