

S.J. health group hails webinar on neonatal syndrome

By John Bays/News-Sentinel Staff Writer

As part of their ongoing work to address the county's opioid crisis, the nonprofit Health Plan of San Joaquin is promoting a free webinar by Dr. Matthew Grossman of Yale Medical School on neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) on Monday, July 30 from noon to 1:30 p.m.

"NAS is a term we reserve for babies withdrawing from opiates, but the majority of drugs babies in San Joaquin County have been exposed to these days are amphetamines and marijuana," Dr. Jeffrey Lindenberg, a neonatal specialist at San Joaquin General Hospital said.

Symptoms of NAS include blotchy skin coloring, excessive or high-pitched crying, fever, seizures, sleep problems, slow weight gain and more, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine's website.

Lindenberg said he believes San Joaquin County is on par with the national average of approximately 30 percent of newborns admitted to neonatal intensive care units having been exposed to marijuana.

Between 5 and 10 percent of newborns in NICUs in both San Joaquin County and the U.S. have been exposed to amphetamines or opiates, Lindenberg said, and SJGH usually sees more behavioral symptoms in newborns with NAS than physical.

"It usually affects their behavior, their self care and coping mechanisms," Lindenberg said. "Depending on the drug, (symptoms) can be anything from lethargy to agitation. I would add that newborn symptoms are probably easier to treat than long-term symptoms. (NAS) can affect a person for the rest of their life."

Alcohol is another substance of concern, Lindenberg said, and the exposure to alcohol or drugs can happen before the pregnancy has been discovered.

"Unfortunately, the timing of exposure is probably the most critical in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy when a lot of mothers don't even know they're pregnant," Lindenberg said.

According to a Thursday press release from HPSJ, Grossman and his Yale Medical School team developed a treatment program for infants with NAS involving low-stimulation environments, frequent feedings, swaddling with blankets and having parents act as primary caregivers.

This new approach reduced hospital stays for such infants from 30 days to five, the press release said, and is intended to serve as an alternative to the old practice of removing newborns from their mothers, placing them in a neonatal intensive care unit and treating them with morphine.

For more information or to register for the webinar, visit www.hpsj.com/Providers.