

Dr. Frank Montecalvo

Saint Francis University

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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairman and members of the Center for Rural Pennsylvania's Board of Directors. My name is Dr. Frank Montecalvo, Vice President for Student Development at Saint Francis University. Thank you for inviting me to offer comments regarding our institution's experience and response to the growing heroin and opiate problem in our region.

Saint Francis University is a Catholic, Franciscan institution of higher education. As a campus located in rural Cambria County, we are susceptible to the benefits and challenges of our surrounding community. We feel an institutional responsibility to be aware of and to prepare for the issues that will impact the environment of our students.

In my position, I manage the Student Development Division which includes a Division I Athletics Program, Multi-cultural Affairs, the Counseling Center; Residence Life, the Center for Student Engagement, Judicial Affairs and the Office of Drug and Alcohol Education. In some way, shape, or form, the Student Development Division intersects with every student on campus. As such, we encounter and manage a gamut of student issues and challenges. Although we have **not** seen evidence of opiate abuse on campus, we recognize what is occurring in our local communities and realize that we need to be prepared.

With this said, in an effort to be proactive, Mr. David Wilson, Director of Counseling Services at Saint Francis University, coordinated a workshop which was conducted on campus May 2, 2014. Under Dave's leadership this workshop entitled "Emerging Drug Trends: The Epidemic Threat to our Educational Communities" was held. Dave was the driving force behind this conference as he responded to the community forum sponsored by WJAC TV which identified the growing epidemic and threat to our communities. The urgency of this matter was underscored by the fact there were four heroin overdoses in the greater Johnstown area the night before the conference.

As an educational institution, we strongly believe that we have a responsibility to address this issue. The coordination of the Saint Francis Conference highlighted our concern and reflected our University's mission of community service and educational outreach. In hosting the conference, it was our intent to provide education to professionals from high schools, colleges, and health care agencies in our region. The response was overwhelming. With conference attendees from 13 school districts, 12 colleges and universities, and 75 clinicians from various agencies, the seriousness of this topic was significant.

The conference served as a vehicle for education on current substances of abuse, trends in addiction and abuse regionally. It provided the opportunity for meaningful collaboration between treatment professionals, high school, and college personnel.

Testimony from the conference revealed that substances of abuse change quickly and new trends develop so fast - - - that the need for timely, ongoing education and prevention is more essential than ever. The overwhelming evidence of the heroin epidemic was extremely concerning to those in attendance - for they will be the ones dealing with these challenges. The themes consistently raised at this conference were: Are we equipped to recognize the problem? and Do we have the skillset to effect successful interventions?

The major outcome of the conference findings was to continue awareness and education to the professionals keeping them abreast of trends, substances of abuse, treatment, and intervention strategies. There must be more opportunity for collaboration and discussion between clinicians, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and university personnel. *Conference evaluations clearly emphasized the need for continuing collaboration.*

Subsequently, we at Saint Francis University believe that, to effectively combat the heroin epidemic, there needs to be a more sustained effort that provides:

- opportunities for continuing education;
- resources to support prevention and intervention; and
- continued collaboration of educational and clinical professionals in the community.

Saint Francis University remains seriously concerned about this critical threat to our young people and is committed to helping develop solutions to this problem.

Mr. Chairman and Mr. Vice-Chairman we support you, and applaud the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, in your efforts to address this public health and wellness issue. We strongly pledge our continued cooperation with this panel and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We ask that you consider us as a partner as you move forward in developing policies to eradicate the heroin epidemic.