

# United Way will join safety net for drug-addicted babies

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**HERMITAGE** – How can our community help women who are addicted to opiates and deliver babies who face detoxing at birth?

The United Way of Mercer County held a brainstorming session last week to get to the root of the growing problem.

“We realize that there are barriers in people’s lives,” said Jim Micsky, United Way executive director. “And that’s the first thing we recognize, that we want to break the barrier today that the person’s facing. Let’s get over that, but let’s not go back to it tomorrow. Let’s try and get over this little step today and keep going.”

One of the biggest barriers in the battle is the judgmental attitude against opiate addiction, according to Bawn Maguire, a clinical nurse specialist at Magee-Womens Hospital of UPMC, Pittsburgh, who started an inpatient methadone conversion program there in 2002.

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“In every medical journal you’ll read it (opiate addiction) is a chronic medical condition and yet we still fight the battle that people still want to decide that it’s a moral failing.”

Clinical nurse specialist **Bawn Maguire**

failing,” Maguire said of opiate addiction.

Maguire spoke to volunteers, some of whom were administrators and clinical nurse managers from both Sharon Regional Health System and UPMC Horizon, Farrell, the two hospitals in the county where babies are delivered. Combined, the two hospitals delivered 79 Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome babies in 2015.

“There’s a whole lot of layers to opiate addiction,” Maguire said. “And we’re trying to take

a look at all the layers.”

One of those layers is societal, due to prescription pain pills being readily available, according to Maguire.

“Most of the women that I talk with have started their addiction either

through pre-scribed pills for themselves

for an injury or prescribed pills for a family member that progressed into the full-blown addiction,” Maguire said.

“They don’t typically jump straight into heroin. I never see it. They move into heroin when they can no longer get

the pills.”

Maguire recommended treating the chronic disease of addiction and then helping the mothers to become good parents.

In 2014, Magee collaborated with three local insurance companies and the Allegheny County Office of Behavioral Health to open a Pregnancy Recovery Center to provide concurrent treatment for opiate use disorders and prenatal care and delivery.

“We don’t need to spend time putting guilt on this mother,” Maguire said. “When you get a woman into recovery you’re helping her future.”

Magee sends its moms home with an enhanced sleep package. “Cribs for Kids,” provides cribs and Halo donates Pack and Plays so each baby has a safe place to sleep.

The United Way of Mercer County will continue its efforts to help the families of NAS babies as part of its “Lifting Families out of Poverty” initiative.

“There was a lot of discussion today about communication,” Micsky said. “That’s probably one of the first keys

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**United Way**

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for us is that we are all on the same page.”

The first step the United Way will take is to network with organizations so they can form partnerships or strengthen existing ones in order to provide support for these families.

“You want to build the healthiest family that you can build,” Maguire said. “We need to say, ‘Let me cast away all judgment. Let me put all the love I can around this family.’”