

Director of ODMH visits Portsmouth

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Tracy J. Plouck, Director, Ohio Department of Mental Health

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Tracy J. Plouck, Director of the Ohio Department of Mental Health, was in town Monday to meet with officials at the Scioto County Counseling Center.

“In July we will be consolidating with ODADAS (Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services), which is the cabinet level addiction agency, and since the consolidation was announced last May, I have been traveling around and learning more about alcohol and drug addiction treatments, intervention services around the state,” Plouck said. “Today, I was fortunate enough to spend the day with (The Counseling Center Executive Director) Ed Hughes and the folks at The Counseling Center.”

Plouck said she visited the clinic, the residential treatment centers, and talked with those involved with those programs.

“One of our key priorities now in the governor’s budget that has been proposed and is supposed to take effect in July, is the expansion of Medicaid to individuals up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level,” Plouck said. “Many of the folks who are currently receiving services through The Counseling Center and other folks who are waiting for services, and who may be waiting because they lack a care source, I think the governor’s priority to extend Medicaid benefits will do significant good throughout the state, but particularly in areas like this where there are a lot of folks who, for whatever reason, do not have health care.”

Plouck said about 50 percent of the people who will be eligible through the Medicaid expansion may already be working, but may be working without health insurance and unable to afford insurance based on their hourly wages.

“I think this (Medicaid expansion) will have great benefit for a healthier work force as well as healthier families,” Plouck said.

Hughes said this area, particularly the Appalachian counties, have the worst health care indicators in the state. The most recent numbers show Scioto County the worst in the state followed by Lawrence County and the trend continues along the river.

“And, as she (Plouck) mentioned, a lot of that is an access issue because we have wonderful hospitals and The Counseling Center is one of the biggest drug and alcohol treatment programs in the state,” Hughes said. “But again, there are all these folks who cannot get the kind of care that they need, across the continuum of health care services.”

“There are few ways to become Medicaid eligible currently, and one of the few ways is if you have children, and you become Medicaid eligible through that child,” Hughes said. “So, if a person doesn’t have children then they do not have Medicaid and they can’t access all these opportunities. And what we are seeing is that generationally now we have generations of sick people. We have generations of unemployed people.”

Hughes said the health care crisis caused by those socioeconomic issues deals with not just the person who can’t get health care, but also with the fact that there may be many family members who may have never had health care.

“Another great benefit of Medicaid expansion is that local communities can take what they are currently spending with clinical services, so if a local ADAMHS (Alcohol, Drug, and Mental Health Services) Board area is buying counseling services, crisis and Medicaid becomes a payer, the federal government in conjunction with the state will pay for that,” Plouck said. “And the local system can actually invest in other kinds of recovery support, such as housing, maybe respite for families, prevention services with the schools. So the existing dollars that we have in the system can be re-directed for purposes that will help prevent the onset of addiction in some cases, and the onset of a mental health crisis, because you can make connections with treatment.”

Plouck said, statewide, once Medicaid is expanded, there will be about a \$70 million amount across the entire state that can be re-directed in that way.

“Our local ADAMHS Board, even though it’s not a lot of money, what money they have they are putting into continuing treatment services, and leaving practically nothing for prevention,” Hughes said. “We estimated that we are spending \$3 per child, per year on prevention services in Scioto County. So the dollars that are going to treatment can be diverted into prevention services.”

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