

Barton embraces CDC's opioid regulations

By Kathryn Reed

Barton Health officials endorse the guidelines passed this month by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention related to prescribing opioid painkillers such as OxyContin and Percocet.

The recommendations focus on the use of opioids for pain that has lasted longer than three months. It does not address those using these drugs for cancer or end-of-life care.

The federal initiative targets primary care physicians because in the United States they are the ones who write almost half of the scripts for opioid painkillers.

The South Shore-based health care system was ahead of the curve. In May 2014, Barton spearheaded a movement to bring a new perspective to prescribing opiates. Local emergency physicians committed to:

- Working closely with community physicians to coordinate care of patients with chronic pain.
- Identifying people with chronic pain and refer them to additional support from their primary care provider and/or a chronic pain specialist.
- Identifying high risk behavior and use that information in our prescribing practice.

Many states already have guidelines for such drugs.

"All hospitals and pharmacies in California and Nevada have policies to regulate prescribing and filling prescriptions of opioids. Barton Health has guidelines for dose based on an

individual patient's pain level or condition, effective pain management strategies, and ways to enhance our patients' comfort and function," Rhonda Sneeringer, chief medical officer for Barton Health, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We take a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach to pain management and work with the providers, patient, and – when appropriate – the patient's family to find a functional, positive quality of life for each patient that may or may not include opioids."

Because opiates may lead to complications, including death, Barton uses non-addictive treatments as well. These include other drugs, acupuncture, aromatherapy, physical therapy, relaxation therapy, and yoga.

"We have also been working hard to address underlying issues that may be causing additional pain, such as substance abuse, mental health issues, stress, or a chronic disease," Lance Orr, medical director for Barton's Emergency Services, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The stated need for the guidelines is because of the high rate of addiction. The CDC said opioid prescriptions reached 259 million in 2012.

Sneeringer added, "Our goal is to help people get back to optimal health measured by function and quality of life, which includes managing level of pain, but not focused solely on becoming pain-free."

Barton plans to hire a pain management specialist to work directly with patients.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., in a statement, said, "The guidelines released by CDC are an important first step in combating the overuse of opioid painkillers, which is one of the root causes of the heroin epidemic in this country. The agency noted that no other medication regularly used to treat nonfatal conditions kills patients as frequently as opioids.

“In too many cases, opioids have become the default response for pain, even when alternatives are available. The guidelines will help doctors determine whether to start or continue opioids for treatment of chronic pain, as well as proper dosing and follow-up. They will also encourage greater use of evidence-based treatment.”

Feinstein was one of eight senators who in November urged the CDC to finalize strong guidelines to address overprescribing.

Study: Cannabis ‘not safe’ for long-term users

By Sarah Heise, KCRA-TV

A study conducted by researchers at the UC Davis found that smoking marijuana “was not safe for the long-term users.”

The study followed children from birth to age 38 and found that those who smoked cannabis four or more days a week ended up in a lower social class than their parents and had lower-paying, less-skilled, less-prestigious jobs than those who were not regular cannabis smokers, according to the research released online Wednesday.

Regular, persistent users also “experienced more financial, work-related and relationship difficulties, which worsened as the number of years of cannabis use progressed,” the study said.

Read the whole story

SLT intent on not being in ambulance business

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has put El Dorado County and Lake Valley Fire Protection District on notice that it intends to get out of the ambulance service by April 15.

The multiyear contract between the three agencies allows for any entity to give a 30-day notice. The city did so on March 15.

The City Council took that unanimous action in closed session that Tuesday and the City Attorney's Office subsequently wrote the letter. (Councilman Hal Cole was not at that meeting.) The city, assuming it does get out of the contract, will have to forfeit a \$50,000 bond.

The city and Lake Valley in 2001 were first awarded the contract from the county. The fire agencies work together under the Cal-Tahoe Joint Powers Authority to provide ambulance service in their combined territories. Two members from each of their respective boards sit on the JPA.

At issue is the reimbursement the JPA gets from the county to operate the ambulance service. It's been an issue for years. The city contends it is spending \$700,000 a year in excess of what it is reimbursed.

Both fire agencies want 100 percent reimbursement and are frustrated that more than \$2 million is sitting in a county controlled fund for the JPA. The money comes from the assessment property owners pay and ambulance fees that are

collected via the JPA.

County officials contend there is no way that money can be released because of the contract that is in place. To do so could potentially result in a lawsuit from one of the bidders because it is a fixed priced contract.

“We have the fund balance for unanticipated expenses,” Creighton Avila, CAO spokesman, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “Also paid out of that are things like billing and contracts. There could be any number of emergencies out there. That is what the fund balance is there for.”

What no one at the city – elected or staff – could explain is why in 2015 the JPA agreed to extend the contract three years, so now it expires in 2019. At least one city councilmember would have had to say yes to it. Councilmembers Tom Davis and JoAnn Conner were the city’s reps at the time of the decision. Now the JPA has Davis and Mayor Wendy David as members. Davis did not return a phone call. At no time did the council as a whole give direction to JPA members Davis and Conner to extend the contract.

Lake Valley would gladly take over the ambulance service – which has been discussed in earnest since last summer.

“Yes, we want to take it over, but there is not enough revenue under the existing contract for staffing of all three ambulances,” Lake Valley Fire Chief Gareth Harris told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The next JPA meeting is set for April 11. It’s possible an emergency one will be scheduled before then.

In a statement, the county Chief Administrator’s Office said, “The county is expressly concerned about the threat to public health and safety of residents and visitors to the South Lake Tahoe region should the city of South Lake Tahoe terminate its ambulance service contract, with the Cal-Tahoe JPA, without

making adequate provisions to ensure that its action will not put ambulance service in the South Lake Tahoe region at risk.”

South Lake Tahoe Fire Chief Jeff Meston told Lake Tahoe News, “There won’t be any interruption to ambulance service. That is not good for anyone and we won’t allow that to occur.”

The county sent the city a letter on Tuesday. As of Thursday no one at the city had seen said letter. The city has not provided *LTN* with its letter.

The county in its letter says the JPA board per the contract would have to agree to the termination by the city.

The letter says, “The Cal-Tahoe JPA board members and member agencies should consider all of the consequences, financial and otherwise, that could result if the Cal-Tahoe JPA agreed to allow a member agency to terminate one of the subcontracts without making adequate provisions to ensure that ambulance service is not put at risk.”

The letter goes on to say, “While the county remain open to discussing alternative proposals for operations after the expiration of the existing EMS agreement, please be on notice that the county intends to exercise and enforce its rights under the existing EMS agreement and to pursue any and all available remedies if there is an event of a default.”

Northstar, guest 180 degrees apart on assault

By Kathryn Reed

A woman who has a blog called “Shred Mom” has made scathing

accusations against Northstar ski resort. The resort says its investigation into the allegations found the woman to be the aggressor. Placer County sheriff's detectives are investigating.

Danelle Muresan-Foster – the blogger – told detectives the incident occurred Feb. 25. She made the report the next day. She did not respond to *Lake Tahoe News* for a comment.

According to the statement she gave to deputies, the brouhaha started when someone allegedly rode close to Muresan-Foster's son. She confronted the man, yelling at him. She told officers he then bumped her with his chest. She slapped him. He punched her in the left eye. She declined medical attention.

She posted her **original story** on March 23 and updated it today. It has since made the rounds on social media.

To counter the charges, Northstar GM and Vice President Beth Howard **issued a statement** Thursday.

"It is important for everyone to know our first and foremost priority is the safety of our guests and employees, and we have zero tolerance for acts of violence. We conducted a timely, thorough investigation into this matter, and given recent interest we believe that it is important to report the results," Howard said. "One eyewitness to the incident stated Mrs. Danelle Muresan-Foster was the party who was physically aggressive toward another guest. The eyewitness stated that Mrs. Muresan-Foster collided into the male guest in the lift maze from behind; she fell to the ground; and, he tried to help her up. The same eyewitness also stated that Mrs. Muresan-Foster initiated the physical altercation by slapping the other guest."

The man's name has not been released.

Dena Erwin with the sheriff's department told *Lake Tahoe News* the investigation is ongoing. More statements were taken March

24 with resort officials. She would not venture a guess as to when the investigation will be done. Ultimately it will be up to the District Attorney's Office to determine if charges are filed against anyone.

Calif. to vote on \$15/hr. minimum wage

By Associated Press

A proposal to raise California's minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2021 qualified Tuesday to appear on the statewide November ballot.

California's current minimum wage is among the highest in the nation at \$10 an hour. The measure backed by a faction of health care workers belonging to the state largest union would raise it by \$1 each of the next five years.

Subsequently, minimum wage increases would be tied to the cost of living.

Two groups within the Service Employees International Union have split the organization's support between competing initiatives to raise California's minimum wage.

SEIU United Healthcare Workers West proposed the measure approved Tuesday.

"This is the one that was moving first, this is the one that qualified first, this is the one that's the focus," Sean Wherley, spokesman for the health care workers, said.

The SEIU state council, and the tens of millions of dollars it

has promised to spend on a statewide campaign, is behind a different initiative that is still in the signature-gathering process .

That plan would raise wages to \$15 by 2020 for large businesses and by 2021 for smaller ones. It would also raise the minimum number of annual paid sick days from three to six.

The SEIU state council has said it hoped the measures could merge, but the qualified measure cannot be amended.

“One or the other would have to be withdrawn,” Wherley said.

The union would have until June 30, a state-mandated deadline, to decide whether to remove one of the proposals.

California Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, is supporting both proposals.

Businesses and Democratic Gov. Jerry Brown have said such a steep wage increase would be incredibly costly.

Oregon officials approved a law earlier this month that will increase that state’s minimum wage to nearly \$15 in urban areas over the next six years.

Joint effort lands repeat offenders in jail

Operation Safer Streets culminated with eight people being arrested on charges of violating conditions of their supervision and four non-supervised individuals were arrested for allegedly committing new crimes.

Operation Safer Streets was a multi-agency collaborative effort to perform personal contacts on high-risk offenders under the supervision of the Division of Parole and Probation. It took place March 18-19 in Douglas, Washoe, Carson and Lyon counties.

Officers performed 74 home contacts, four employment contacts, four field contacts, 40 drug tests, and 28 K-9 searches. In addition to meeting with offenders, officers performed 48 personal contacts with members of the community to verify offender compliance.

Grassroots effort under way to change SLT

By Kathryn Reed

Creating a voice for the 80 percent in the middle, not the fringe on either side. That was the impetus to bring together a group of about 50 people on Tuesday. The discussion was all about how to make South Lake Tahoe better.

While Jamie and David Orr of Tahoe Mountain Lab facilitated the meeting, they didn't take ownership of it per se. Their goal was to get people to discuss issues in a positive way that leads to action. It's not that the group as a whole will do something – or it might. Talking about change and how to make it happen was the bulk of the discussion.

"This meeting is to build trust in the community," David Orr said to the packed group at the American Legion on March 23.

Building trust started with listening and sharing.

It was a diverse group who came out, with most admitting they met new people that night, and learned a thing or two.



Jamie Orr, standing, listens as people discuss what they want for the future of the South Shore community. Photo/LTN

Everyone was asked to name one local issue they care about. The answers included: education, poverty, economic development/sustainability, recreation, affordable housing, divisiveness in the community, environment, strong community, homeless veterans, broadband Internet, pet welfare, climate change, clean energy, children, blight, the number of voters – or lack thereof, bear boxes, natural resources, higher education, and health care.

Seven smaller groups were formed – with the goal of people splitting up from friends – and they were to address two questions:

- How can I as a person make an impact on the community?
- How can this group make an impact on the community?

It was a collegial gathering, with some people leaving eager and inspired to bring about the change they envision, while others looked at things a bit more skeptically.

City Councilman Austin Sass told his group and the larger one it's great people want the council to do X, Y and Z, but at most he receives three emails a week from people about an issue. So, while people might want change, they aren't talking to the people who can help make it happen.

At the end of the night individually people were asked to either talk about what they heard that they like that was not their idea/concern or what they will commit to do going forward.

Answers included: people in El Dorado County want better ways to impact city issues, getting people to vote, create a publication for new residents, paying more attention, finding two people to run for City Council, getting friends involved, helping groups to collaborate – building trust and bridges, accountability, communication, political action, reach out to the City Council, and get Latinos involved.

The consensus was to meet again. Next time it will be a different organizer.

"It's time to get to work," Jamie Orr said as the meeting ended.

Timeshare hard sell comes

roaring back

By Gretchen Morgenson, New York Times

For more than 25 years, Mary Ann Gutierrez, 77, has spent several weeks a year in South Lake Tahoe, often playing host to her children and grandchildren at one of two timeshare units she owns.

When she checked into one of the properties last year, she was stopped at the front desk. A \$100 gift card would be hers if she attended a presentation by Diamond Resorts International, the company that owns the resort. But first she had to fill out some papers and supply her credit card information.

The gift card came with a cost, as Gutierrez soon learned. For five hours, she said, Diamond representatives pushed her to give up both of her timeshare deeds, including one at the nearby Tahoe Beach & Ski Club, a resort that Diamond does not own. With the upgrade and membership in Diamond's ownership points system, they said, she would keep her maintenance costs low and could use her points at other resorts in the company's network. It would cost just \$30,000 upfront, they said.

Even when representatives suggested her maintenance fees would rise if she didn't switch, Gutierrez kept declining, saying that the cost was too high. Undeterred, the Diamond representatives suggested that she ask her children to pay for the upgrade. She continued to say no and, at last, they let her go.

"They weren't going to let me out that door," Ms. Gutierrez said. "I was shaking, I was so nervous."

The feeling turned to shock, however, when a Diamond representative handed her a record of a voided charge in the amount of \$4,840 on her credit card. The representatives had been so certain that she would agree to the offer that they

had charged her card for the down payment – even though she had not given approval.

Read the whole story

Suspected serial bank robber sought by FBI



This man is wanted in connection with multiple bank robberies.

The FBI is seeking information that may lead to the apprehension of an armed and dangerous bank robber who has robbed seven banks in Northern California and may have cased one bank.

Dubbed the “Bad Breath Bandit” for his use of a disposable paper face mask during the commission of most of the robberies, the suspect is a Caucasian male who stands approximately 6-feet tall, weighs between 210-250 pounds, with a medium build, and has dark hair.

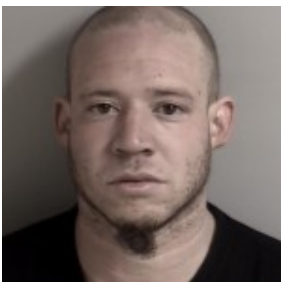
He is wanted in the following robberies:

- June 17, 2014: Tri-Counties Bank located at 305 Railroad Avenue in Nevada City (possible casing); Bank of the West located at 460 Brunswick Road in Grass Valley
- Sept. 25, 2015: Umpqua Bank located at 7843 Highway 99 East in Los Molinos
- Nov. 13, 2014: Tri Counties Bank located at 9411 Midway in Durham
- Feb. 5, 2015: 22712 Main St. in Columbia
- March 30, 2015: Tri Counties Bank located at 305 Railroad Road in Nevada City
- May 18, 2015: U.S. Bank located at 236 Main St. in Chester
- March 21, 2016: El Dorado Savings located at 6310 Highway 193 in Georgetown.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Bay Area man convicted of robbery in SLT

A jury this week convicted a Bay Area man in the armed robbery of people outside the CVS drug store in the Bijou Center in South Lake Tahoe.



Adam Sanford

Adam James Sanford, 32, of Hayward was convicted of two counts of robbery, two counts of attempted robbery, four counts of assault with a semiautomatic firearm, as well as special allegations for use and discharge of a firearm and use of a deadly weapon in the commission of a robbery.

Officers started looking for Sanford after two South Lake Tahoe men called about 7:10pm Nov. 13 to say one of their wallets had been stolen by a man brandishing a gun and long-bladed knife. They were near the CVS. Then there was a report about the same time of the suspect firing at least one round after robbing two Tahoe basin residents at the rear of the Tahoe Beach Retreat Hotel. Officers nabbed Sanford after they saw him walk across Highway 50 to the Safeway parking lot.

At the time he was on probation from Sacramento County for burglary.

Sanford is scheduled to be sentenced April 18 in El Dorado County Superior Court.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report