As the opioid crisis continues to rage across America, pain treatment providers are playing an even larger role in offering effective non-narcotic pain relief options to patients.

“There are many effective non-opioid pain treatments. These are non-addictive and can actually treat pain better,” said Michael Grille, MD, of the Hartford Hospital Pain Treatment Center. Dr. Grille hosted an hour-long Hartford HealthCare Walk to Wellness talk, “Treating Pain in the Midst of the Opioid Crisis,” on Tuesday, Jan. 2, at Westfarms Mall in West Hartford.

Grille said the issue of over-prescribing opioids has been lingering for some time, long before the crisis took hold.

“There’s a subset of pain treatment providers who have felt that these medications are not the best long-term option for patients. I think the crisis has made this apparent to the entire medical community,” said Grille.

While there are many cases, such as post-operative patients, in which opioids are appropriate for short-term pain treatment, the long-term use of opioids has actually proven to be less effective in some patients, said Grille. Grille added that overuse of opioids can lead to many detrimental effects including opioid-induced hyperalgesia in which a patient becomes more sensitive to pain.

“On functional scales and on pain scales, there isn’t much of a difference between patients who are treated with chronic opioid medications and those who aren’t,” said Grille. “So, if pain relief is the same with or without opioids, isn’t it better to avoid the possible side...
effects and dangers? Our Pain Treatment Center is a hub where we can connect patients to physical therapy, psychological therapy, interventional therapies, integrative medicine, and many different options for pain treatment.”

Side effects from opioid use include nausea, vomiting, constipation, respiratory depression, sexual dysfunction and physical dependence.

Rushford Medical Director J. Craig Allen, MD, said he’s pleased the pain treatment community is working to educate patients about other treatment options.

“At Hartford HealthCare, we want to ensure that our patients have the safest, most effective pain treatment while reducing risk of misuse, abuse, addiction and overdose from opioid pain medication,” Allen said. “The best way to accomplish this is by educating patients and their families so that the choice of pain treatment can be a shared decision making process. Patients need to know the potential risks, benefits and potential efficacy of all available treatment options.”

Allen said, while pain management providers are well-trained in offering alternative pain strategies, there needs to be more of an emphasis on pain management and addiction in medical schools and graduate medical training for all specialties.

“Patient and provider should be aware that the longer one is on opioid medications the greater the chance of developing addiction, and that after just 10 days of medication the risk of still taking them a year later is 20 percent. If a patient requires more than a week of opioid analgesic medication, the patient and prescriber should review the current treatment strategy,” Allen said.
In the 1980s, America had “Pac Man Fever,” a supposedly harmless compulsion to play the dot munching arcade game. There was even a popular song about the so-called affliction.

Now more than 30 years later, world health leaders believe that addiction to video games is actually quite real. In December, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially added “Gaming Disorder” to its list of recognized diseases.

“This really validates what dozens of studies over the past 15 years have shown: that there is a substantial minority of gamers who suffer from behavioral addiction to playing video games,” says Natchaug Hospital Associate Medical Director for Ambulatory Services Paul Weigle, MD, a national expert on the subject who chairs the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry’s Media Committee.

“It doesn’t mean that all video gamers are pathological. The great majority aren’t. But there is a subgroup of users, much like with alcohol, who become addicted.”

WHO says the disorder is characterized by “impaired control over gaming, increased priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and the continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences.”

Weigle says the classification by the WHO also means a greater possibility that insurance companies will pay for treatment.

“In the past [getting reimbursement] was almost impossible. This official recognition will open up new avenues, not only for identification, but also treatment,” Weigle says.

Weigle says that, while gaming disorder is most often seen in children and adolescents, adults are not immune to the illness.

“It is often comorbid with other psychiatric conditions, like depression or anxiety, which is common in most child and adolescent psychiatry cases. It’s relatively uncommon to see the disorder on its own,” Weigle says.

Weigle says symptoms for gaming disorder are similar to symptoms for substance and other behavioral addictions.

“The habit becomes so excessive that it crowds out other activities to the point of causing dysfunction in one’s life. The affected person might not get enough sleep, stop socializing, fail behind in school or miss work, give up other hobbies or lie about how much time they’re actually playing,” Weigle says.

For parents, Weigle says it’s important to set strict guidelines for how long a child or adolescent can play video games to help prevent them from becoming addicted. However, he warns against abruptly cutting off access to games if a child has become dependent because of the risk of a child in crisis causing harm to themselves or others. If a parent or an adult gamer is concerned that they might have gaming disorder, Weigle says they should contact a primary care provider who can do an initial assessment and make a referral to a mental health provider if appropriate.

The Hartford HealthCare East Region Behavioral Health Network recently announced two new program directors. Sarah Connell, LCSW, LADC, has been hired as program manager for Backus Hospital’s partial hospitalization program and outpatient clinic, and Kevin Gyure, LCSW, has accepted the position of program director for Joshua Center Enfield. They will be responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations of their programs and supervising clinical teams. Both Connell and Gyure will report to Carrie Pichie.

Prior to Backus, Connell served as a clinic supervisor at Hartford Dispensary locations in Norwich and New London, while also working as a per diem Assessment and Care Management Specialist for Natchaug Hospital’s inpatient program. She also spent time as a therapist at Natchaug’s Care Plus program in Groton, and as a counselor for Hartford Dispensary and the Connecticut Department of Corrections.

Connell completed her master’s of social work at the University of Connecticut and her undergraduate degree in social work at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Gyure comes to Natchaug from the Department of Behavioral Health and Disability Services at Central State Hospital in Petersburg, Va., where he served as a clinical social work supervisor and forensic clinical social worker. Before that, Gyure worked with at-risk youth as regional program manager for Specialized Youth Services of Virginia and as intensive care coordinator and clinical case manager for District 10 Community Service Board, also in Petersburg.

Gyure graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with his master’s of social work and received a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Connecticut.
High five: BHN logged many accomplishments in 2017

While this is by no means an exhaustive list, now that 2017 is in the books, here is a look back at five accomplishments across the BHN in the past year.

1. Added recovery coaches to emergency departments at Backus Hospital, Windham Hospital, The Hospital of Central Connecticut and MidState Medical Center. They allow ED staff to concentrate on emergencies, while doing the non-clinical things that can make all the difference for patient experience. Approximately 90 percent of drug and alcohol clients are keeping their recovery appointments, compared to 20 percent prior.

2. Because people with chronic health problems tend to have behavioral health conditions, the BHN expanded its Primary Care Behavioral Health initiative across Hartford HealthCare, with behavioral health professionals embedded into primary care practices. Conditions such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse are addressed immediately, rather than asking patients to attend appointments or weeks later. More than 80 percent of patients are keeping their follow up behavioral health appointments and emergency room utilization and inpatient stays are down.

3. Launched first BHN Clinical Council to focus on the Zero Suicide initiative, which started at the Institute of Living and is being rolled out across the BHN. Led by IOL Medical Director Linda Durst, Zero Suicide is a methodology to eliminate suicide and a state of mind that one suicide is too many. The national program includes best practices and tools for health systems and the community.

4. Olin Neuropsychiatry Research Center at the Institute of Living (IOL) continued national research studies. Dr. Godfrey Pearlson and Dr. Michael Stevens were awarded a several-million-dollar grant to study the effects of smoking marijuana on the brain and on a person’s ability to drive a car. David Glahn, PhD, received the prestigious Joel Elkes Research Award from the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology for his contributions toward understanding the roles of genomics and biomarkers in those suffering from mental illnesses. A study by Dr. Michael Stevens has the potential to radically reframe how researchers think about ADHD.

5. The BHN MATCH (Medication Assisted Treatment Close to Home) program continues to grow, with Natchaug adding services for teenagers and Rushford adding a new location in Avon. The MATCH programs, which include everything from Suboxone to yoga, are expanding across the state. Rushford and Natchaug also continue to provide first responders, patients, family members and others with Narcan, a life-saving drug for overdose patients — and training on how to use it.

The year in pictures

The year in photos included, from top, Chaplain Eugenia “Jeanne” Pedane plays the flute at the World Suicide Prevention Day flag lowering ceremony; Harold Schwartz, MD, Hartford HealthCare Vice President for Behavioral Health and IOL Psychiatrist In Chief, right, presented the 2017 C. Charles Burlingame award to Harold Pincus, MD; Participants celebrate sinking a putt at the 2017 Rushford Golf Tournament; and Tonya Cutler, a graduate of the Recovery University program, left, receives her certificate from recovery coach Karen Kangas.
Dear Colleagues:

We accomplished a lot as a team in 2017, and there are many exciting opportunities for us to improve, innovate and focus on in the new year.

While it is tempting to recount a list of accomplishments or what’s ahead in 2018, I’d rather use this column as an opportunity to thank our staff for their contributions in the past year.

As with any organization, there were ups and downs, but what remained consistent through it all was the dedication you showed towards caring for our clients and families. This is inspiring to me and the many clients we care for who are on their journey to recovery.

Your selflessness — especially those who work nights, weekends, holidays and, as we just experienced, during and after snowstorms (or bomb cyclones as the media was calling it) — does not go unnoticed.

In the field of behavioral health, many of us are no strangers to emergencies and the need to work or be on call 24/7. But that doesn’t make spending a holiday away from our families, coming in on a day off or driving to work in a snowstorm any easier.

These selfless acts are what make our profession both difficult and special. We’ve certainly endured some difficult situations in the past couple weeks, but being able to stay focused on patient care and all that it requires is what makes you special. Each and every one of you play an important role in the success of our maturing Behavioral Health Network — and its bright future.

In all my time here I have been very impressed with your skill, and moved by your kindness. I am truly blessed to call you my colleagues.

I hope during the holidays you had time to reflect on the great work you’ve done in the past year, and also hope you had the opportunity to spend quality time with your family and loved ones.

In all my time here I have been very impressed with your skill, and moved by your kindness.

And for those of you who worked during the latest blizzard or the holidays, I thank you for taking time away from your families to care for our patients. The holiday and winter season is such a difficult and vulnerable time for our clients. Please know how important your kindness is to their treatment and recovery, time and time again, I have seen how meaningful this can be.

On behalf of the entire BHN Leadership Team, I wish you and your family nothing but the best in the new year. Thank you.

Pat Rehmer, MSN, ACHE, is Hartford HealthCare senior vice president for behavioral health and president of the Behavioral Health Network.

Six BHN doctors named tops in Hartford area

Six psychiatrists from the Behavioral Health Network have been named to Hartford Magazine’s Best Doctors list for 2017. Doctors recognized by Hartford include:

- Karen Blank, MD, The Institute of Living
- Linda Durst, MD, The Institute of Living
- Joanna Fogg-Waberski, MD, The Institute of Living
- Evan Fox, MD, Institute of Living, Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
- Harold “Hank” Schwartz, MD, The Institute of Living
- Samuel Silverman, MD, Rushford in Avon

Providers are chosen by their peers from The Best Doctors in America database, which includes more than 45,000 U.S. doctors in more than 40 medical specialties and 400 subspecialties. The Best Doctors in America® database is compiled and maintained by Best Doctors, Inc.
More than 10 percent of healthcare workers are expected to misuse alcohol or drugs during the course of their professional life, according to various studies. While that isn’t any higher than the general public, people working in healthcare may ignore their own needs to focus on caring for others. This is true for substance abuse as well as mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Like any serious health problem, depression and addiction require professional help. But it can be harder to get help when you work long hours in a stressful environment like a hospital or other healthcare facility.

“Healthcare professionals struggle like everyone else,” said Lee Albert, LCSW, LADC. “But many have a deep sense of shame and embarrassment about needing the very care they provide to others. Many people suffer in silence for a long time.”

Albert, who is the program manager for the Institute of Living’s Professionals Program, said many people facing mental health issues or substance abuse minimize their symptoms in order to maintain their professional reputation and avoid being stigmatized. But there are ways to improve relationships and day-to-day living concerns.

“The Professionals Program is a good fit for people working in our organization because they are treated in groups with other healthcare professionals and other professional employees who are facing similar diagnoses,” Albert said. Many struggle with substance abuse or mental health issues for a long time before finding treatment that works for them. The Professionals Program, which is open to anyone, is a perfect fit when outpatient services aren’t enough — but inpatient services are too intensive.

“Caregivers benefit most from a group setting where they can discuss their concerns and challenges with people they can relate to,” Albert said. “Research into group therapy shows these groups are most successful when they contain people with common experiences who can understand and learn from each other.”

The program is committed to maintaining privacy and confidentiality for people seeking care from within the system, Albert said.

For information and assessments, call the Institute of Living Assessment Center at 860.545.7200. You can also request a referral through the Employee & Family Assistance Program by calling 1.800.526.3485.

The Department of Psychology at the Institute of Living recently announced two changes that affect the structure of the Psychology Department and its training programs. These include the appointments of Laura Saunders, PsyD, ABPP, to the role of Assistant Director of Psychology, and the appointment of Kevin Young, PhD, ABPP to the role of Assistant Director of Psychology Training. They will continue in their current roles and will assist James DeGiovanni, PhD, in his administrative duties as Director of Psychology and Training.

Dr. Saunders obtained her doctoral degree from the University of Hartford and is the Clinical Coordinator of The Right Track/LGBTQ Intensive Outpatient program in Young Adult Services, the only program of its kind in CT. She has been a longstanding core member of the Psychology Department’s Child and Adolescent training programs and in 2015, was named as the co-Employee of the Year for Hartford Hospital. She appears regularly in local TV news to provide psychological input on topics relevant to youth and families and has been very active in the roll-out of our Zero Suicide initiatives.

Dr. Young obtained his doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology at Fairleigh Dickinson University and completed his Doctoral Internship in Clinical Psychology and his Neuropsychology Fellowship here at the IOL. He is board-certified in both Clinical Psychology and Clinical Neuropsychology. He will continue in his roles of Coordinator of the Psychological Testing Service and Coordinator of the Neuropsychology Fellowship program. In his new role, he will partner with Dr. DeGiovanni in a variety of training-related responsibilities.
Family Resource Center Support Groups

The IOL Family Resource Center (FRC) holds regular support groups. All programs are free of charge and, unless otherwise noted, are held in the Massachusetts Cottage, First Floor Group Room at the IOL Campus, 200 Retreat Ave., Hartford. The upcoming IOL FRC Support Group schedule is as follows:

- **Support Group For Those Coping With A New Or Chronic Medical Condition.** Jan. 12, 19, 26, Feb. 9, 16, 23. (Every Friday except the first of the month), 1 - 2 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For young adults ages 17-26 struggling with a new diagnosis, chronic medical conditions, physical symptoms or limitations. The group will help with difficult losses and limitation due to a medical condition, and build a positive, future-oriented focus with realistic goals. To RSVP, please email marissa.sicley-rogers@hhchealth.org.

- **Depression Bipolar Support Alliance Group (DBSA).** Jan. 15, 22, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26. (Every Monday), noon – 1 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room and Jan. 17, 24, 31, Feb. 7, 14, 21, 28 (Every Wednesday), 7 – 8 p.m. in the Commons Building, 2nd Floor, Litchfield Room. Peer run support group for those who have been diagnosed with depression or bipolar disorder.

- **Dementia Lecture: An Introduction.** Jan. 16, April 17, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This program is for family members and friends of individuals who have dementia or a related disorder. It will present a basic understanding of the disorder, its treatment, along with specific suggestions to help family members and friends better cope with the illness. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- **Autism Spectrum Support/Education Group Meeting For Parents.** Jan. 17, Feb. 21, March 21. (Third Wednesday of the month), 6 - 7 p.m. Providing a place for parents of children on the autism spectrum, or another related disorder, to come together and get support and information. Monthly, peer-run support groups interspersed with special guests and speakers to offer additional guidance and perspective. Please RSVP to Goviana at 860.560.1711 or gmorales@spedconnecticut.org.

- **It’s Hard To Be A Mom.** Jan. 18, Feb. 1, 15, March 1, 15. (First and third Thursday of each month), 10 - 11:30 a.m. Peer-led group that acknowledges the inherent challenges with modern-day mothering and offers an opportunity for mothers to come together, share experiences, and support each other. This group welcomes expecting mothers and mothers with babies to discuss any and all challenges associated with motherhood in a safe and open-minded space. Babies welcome! Space is limited. Please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- **Hearing Voices Network (HVN).** Jan. 18, 25, Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29. (Every Thursday), 5 - 6:30 p.m. in the Todd Building, Bunker Room. Peer run support group based firmly on a belief of self-help, mutual respect and understanding where people can safely share their experiences of voices, visions, unusual sensory perceptions. The groups offer an opportunity for people to accept and find meaning in their experiences that help them regain power over their lives.

- **Support Group For Families Dealing With Major Mental Illness.** Jan. 18, Feb. 1, 15, March 1, 15. (First and third Thursday of each month), 5:15 - 6:30 p.m. in the Center Building, First Floor Conference Room. For family and friends of individuals who have schizophrenia, bipolar or other related disorders. Share your success and struggles. Learn to care for yourself while caring for others.

- **Al-Anon Parent Group.** Jan. 18, 25, Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22. (Every Thursday), 7 - 8 p.m. One hour topic discussion.

- **Introduction To Mental Health Benefits and Services.** Jan. 20, May 1, 6:30 – 7:45 p.m. This presentation will provide an overview of benefit programs available for individuals with mental health disabilities. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- **Social Support Group — LGBTQ Issues (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Questioning).** Jan. 24, Feb. 14, 28, March 14, 28. (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 5 – 6:15 p.m. in the Center Building, Young Adult Service Group Room. Support group for 16- to 23-year-olds who identify LGBTQ issues as being prominent in their lives. The goal is to discuss support strategies to manage life challenges.

- **Trauma Support Group.** Jan. 24, Feb. 14, 28, March 14, 28. (Second and fourth Wednesday of each month), 6-7 p.m. A peer-led group that offers a supportive environment for individuals with any type of trauma history. Attendees will discuss relevant topics and educational materials will be available. To attend, please RSVP to Laura at 860.545.7324.

- **Substance Use Educational And Support Group.** Feb. 8, March 8 (Second Thursday of each month), 4 – 5 p.m. For family members impacted by loved ones with substance abuse.
Students, staff bond at painting event

Students and staff from Windham CDT enjoyed a morning of painting with Vera Gray from “Not Your Average Painting Events” on Friday, Dec. 15.

For more information on bringing a paint event to your program, contact Vera at 860.771.0600 or homepaintevents17@yahoo.com.

Chelsea Groton Bank donates $3,000 for JCTV play area

Chelsea Groton Bank awarded Natchaug Hospital $3,000 to fund an outdoor play area for youth in the Joshua Center Thames Valley CDT school and partial hospital program in Norwich.

The ladder swing and arch swing sets will support therapeutic activities and offer outdoor recreational opportunities for the children and adolescents in the school and program.

JC-Mansfield students host bake sale

Mrs. Hill’s class in the Joshua Center Mansfield CDT School recently completed a bake sale fundraiser with all of the proceeds going to the Holy Family Shelter in Willimantic.

The students worked hard to organize the event by writing letters to get approval, designing posters to advertise the event, making chocolate-covered pretzels and working on their math skills when counting money. The students were able to raise $160 for the shelter, and were able to visit the shelter and present the money to them, which was a rewarding experience for the children.

A BIG thank you to all the Natchaug staff who came out and supported the event — it is greatly appreciated!

Chili cookoff pushed back until March

Please be advised that the Natchaug Hospital Chili Cook-off scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 17 has been rescheduled for Wednesday, March 21. Those of you who already purchased tickets can be reimbursed or tickets can be held until the rescheduled event.

Natchaug doctors pass boards

Congratulations to the following doctors who successfully passed board certifications:

- **Neil King, MD**, Adult Psychiatry
- **Muhammad Hassan Majed, MD**, Addiction Psychiatry
- **Kimberly Riquelme, MD**, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- **Andres Caro-Sabogal, MD**, Psychosomatic
- **Gengyun Wen, MD**, Adult Psychiatry
Conantville group adopts family

The staff of the Natchaug Conantville Office Building and the H3W Friends workgroup came together to provide a special Christmas morning for two families from Joshua Center Mansfield and Windham CDT Schools — including seven children and teens. More than 90 presents were collected, wrapped and delivered to the families.

JC-Enfield students deliver gifts, cards

The students at Joshua Center Enfield CDT School delivered holiday bags to children at the domestic abuse shelter as well as gifts for the family they adopted.

The Leaders Club students also made holiday cards for Connecticut service men and women, which will be delivered by the Red Cross.

As we begin 2018, the students are looking at community service plans for the new year and hope to continue making a difference in their communities.

Rushford Academy hosts teen night, basketball game

On Monday, Dec. 18, Rushford Academy joined Haddam Killingworth’s Healthy Kids Healthy Communities Youth Coalition for their monthly “Teen Night.”

Activities for the evening included gingerbread houses, holiday music, pizza, basketball and more. These events have been made possible by the works of Rushford Academy’s principal Katie Gomes, Youth and Family Services of Haddam-Killingworth prevention coordinator Cristal DePietro and Rushford at Durham recreational therapist Taryn Petrillo.

On Tuesday, Dec. 19, Rushford Academy and Stonegate clients took part in a full court basketball game against Mount Saint John’s in Deep River. The clients came out on top with a 64-33 victory over the Mount Saint John’s basketball team. All clients and staff involved had an amazing time and many memorable moments were formed for these boys!

Glastonbury holiday potluck

Rushford at Glastonbury staff celebrated the holidays in a multicultural fashion, complete with ugly sweaters, food, music and a virtual fireplace.
Adopt-A-Child program brings cheer to 13 kids

On Monday, Dec. 18, Rushford employees wrapped up the annual project, Adopting DCF Children to Grant their Holiday Wishes. This year, the project helped 13 children between the ages of 4 and 17 who are under DCF care. Thank you to the incredible generosity of staff at Rushford who donated, collected and wrapped more than 60 gifts.

Marks receives support award

On Friday, Dec. 15, Rushford’s Kuhn Supported Employment program held its winter-themed client awards ceremony. Participants enjoyed games, prizes, festive music and a delicious lunch.

Awards were presented to participants who excelled at their employment goals and to employers who exemplify competitive employment. The Community Support Award was also presented to Randy Marks from Rushford Facilities. Randy was recognized for his exemplary leadership, selfless acts and dedication.

MHFA classes now found on HealthStream

In an effort to standardize BHN registration for trainings, Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training schedules and registration are now found on HealthStream.

MHFA training is offered at the Institute of Living on the third Friday of each month from now through September 2018. A minimum of 10 participants must be registered in order for the course to be run.

If you are interested in scheduling a training outside of the Hartford region, contact MHFA coordinator Patricia Graham at patriciac.graham@hhchealth.org.

Client Advisory Council

The Rushford Advisory Council is a volunteer collaborative partnership between Rushford staff, clients and their families to help make the client service even better. We are looking for new members that represent all of Rushford’s programs, services and locations.

Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of every month at 5 pm at Rushford-Meriden at 883 Paddock Avenue.

To recommend a client or family member who may be interested in providing ongoing constructive feedback about their experiences at Rushford, please contact Greg.Hogan@hhchealth.org.

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