



## DEPARTMENT of CHILDREN and FAMILIES

*Making a Difference for Children, Families and Communities*



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Commissioner

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**Leading Addiction Psychiatry Expert To Address DCF Leadership  
And Substance Abuse Specialists In Response To Heroin Epidemic**  
*Treating Families Is Focus Of Prevention Efforts*

HARTFORD – In light of a well-publicized and dramatic increase in heroin-related deaths in 2013, a leading expert in addiction psychiatry will train Department of Children and Families leaders and substance abuse specialists on how the agency can improve its response to families impacted by heroin use.

The expert, Dr. Surita Rao, is the chairman and director of Behavioral Health for St. Francis Hospital and a leader in the field of addiction psychiatry. Dr. Rao, who also is an assistant clinical professor at the UCONN School of Medicine, will conduct a lecture on the topic of "Opioid Use Disorders Among Adolescents & Pregnant & Parenting Mothers" to the DCF leadership team and to regional substance abuse specialists on March 26.

Commissioner Katz said the DCF substance abuse specialists who serve each of the six regional offices will use the information to improve how the offices respond to families afflicted with heroin use. "As trends emerge in our society and our state, we need to ensure that our staff has access to the best science available so that we can address needs and prevent further complications from developing, which would require more intensive levels of intervention in the future," Commissioner Katz said.

Dr. Rao's lecture will describe how addiction is a brain disorder. She will review the complex nature of addiction and how it intersects with child welfare. The dynamics found in homes with significant substance use can have a powerful and detrimental impact on families. Children who grow up in homes with substance use disorders have increased exposure to a variety of harmful situations that may hinder optimal social, physical and emotional development, including significantly higher rates of child maltreatment, neglect, and removals from the home. Furthermore, children who are removed due to substance use problems in the home experience lower reunification rates than those removed from homes where there is no substance use.

The chief medical examiners office has reported that accidental heroin deaths in Connecticut increased 48 percent from 2012. There were 257 people who died from heroin-related overdoses in 2013, compared to 174 in 2012.

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This event will be followed with ongoing staff training and development through the Department's Academy for Family and Workforce Knowledge and Development. The Department will be launching an educational series for staff on substance use and child welfare issues that includes adolescent substance use, the biology of addiction, best treatment options, and motivational interviewing to engage family members in the recovery process.

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) also is taking steps to address heroin use in Connecticut. DMHAS-funded substance abuse prevention professionals will re-double their education efforts related to the dangers of prescription drug abuse and heroin use through community forums over the next several months. In addition, DMHAS substance abuse treatment providers are encouraged to consider it standard practice to provide education and prescriptions for Narcan, an overdose reversal medication, to individuals in proximity to those with opioid addiction, including both those currently using and in recovery.

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