

Our Opinion: Governor, General Assembly must heed advice

September 25, 2010

Members of the Ohio Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force are clear about the report they will submit to the state next week -- it's not legislation.

It was never the task force's intent, nor do the members have the power, to enact such a measure.

The task force's mission was to examine the ever-growing issue of prescription drug abuse and suggest ways to address it. The task force held its final meeting last week, and is finalizing the report which will be given to Gov. Ted Strickland and to the General Assembly.

It is the responsibility of those in power to seriously look at the guidelines in the report and begin the process of adopting legislation to combat a war we are losing.

The News Herald made a commitment to follow the issue of prescription drug abuse throughout 2010 and will continue to do so. What we have learned is that it's not a simple issue, but its effects are wide-ranging. It touches on areas of crime, the courts, prevention, treatment and of course money.

We expect members of the task force learned many of the things we have, and did their best to address as many issues as possible. The guidelines they have set forth sound reasonable. They want to see the Ohio Automated Rx Reporting System or OARRS used more effectively. They want to eliminate lag time between when a prescription is filled and when it is entered into the system. It would allow a licensing board already in existence -- Ohio State Medical Board or the Ohio State Pharmacy Board -- to determine who should be required to use the system.

Another key component would be continuing education for prescribers. While the report is not expected to suggest it be mandatory, the task force members hope, as well do, prescribers would want to educate themselves more as problem persists.

They also addressed some issues surrounding pain clinics and offering standards for those clinics,

which is already being considered as part of House Bill 547.

Task force members had an important job, and it appears they did their due diligence to come up with policy advice. While it was disappointing to us that they didn't spend more time focusing on treatment, we understand they had many topics to discuss surrounding prescription drugs and little time to do it in.

Mike Barnes, executive director of the Center for Lawful Access and Abuse Deterrent, or CLAAD, independently reviewed the draft report. He was impressed with the report and said, "On a whole, these recommendations are very strong, creative ideas that I think will make a difference."

All we can do now is hope the governor and the General Assembly recognize the importance of this issue. It's not a problem that will ever go away completely, but we have an opportunity to curb the rampant run of it in our communities.