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## AltaPointe offers free program to help with opioid addiction

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Opioid addiction has been called an epidemic in communities across the country. There's a free program in our area to help kick the addiction. Dr. Christina Talerico with AltaPointe Health Systems joined Studio10 to tell us more.

Opioid addiction affects every population, every gender. If we step out our front doors, and we look to the left or the right, we probably will find someone that has suffered from opioid addiction. Everybody knows someone with this disease. Physicians prescribed enough opioids in 2015 for every American man, woman, and child to be medicated around the clock for three weeks. In Alabama, physicians prescribed more opioids than in any other state, as revealed in an Associated Press and Center for Public Integrity investigation.

AltaPointe received funds through the Alabama Department of Mental Health to provide medication-assisted treatment (MAT) for people who are addicted to opioids. The funding allows AltaPointe to treat people who are unable to pay. We hope that we reach people who are at risk of overdosing if MAT was not made available.

Currently, our medication-assisted treatment program serves 215 people. Statistically, AltaPointe admits more white males with opioid use disorder, although studies show that women are more prone biologically to opioid addiction.

**Why is MAT the best option for many to recover from addiction?** Replacing the illicit opiate with medications such as Methadone® or Suboxone® will control withdrawals and cravings. People do not get high from these medications. They help keep them from not being sick and keep them in and out of constant withdrawals. Seeing the patients every day for the first 90 days also is part of the reason why MAT is so effective. It allows them to feel normal and to be able to function. They are no longer sick and no longer chasing the high. They can repair damaged relationships and can hold down jobs that they were not able to do when they are using.

**Does AltaPointe see many individuals that use heroin?** Occasionally, we see some heroin use from the Gulf Shores area; some from New Orleans. Most clients now prefer legitimate prescriptions such as Norco® and Oxycontin®. A 10 mg Norco® pill goes for \$4 to \$6 on the street. Some addicts need to take ten pills three to four times a day. Compared to the prescription drugs, street heroin is low quality and doesn't work for them.

For more information on the medication-assisted treatment program and whether you qualify please call **(251) 666-2569**.

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