

Prosecutor Spotlight: Naloxone Programs



CAROLYN J.
BRODBECK

BY CAROLYN J. BRODBECK

EVERY DAY, about 110 Americans die from drug overdoses. More than half of these deaths are caused by opioids, such as heroin and prescription pain relievers.¹ Between 2006 and 2010 heroin overdose deaths increased by 45 percent and doubled in at least 28 states between 2010 and 2012.²

Concerned about heroin and prescription painkiller use in their districts, Ocean County Prosecutor Joseph Coronato and Norfolk District Attorney Michael Morrissey — both members of the National District Attorneys Association — have taken action, developing programs to prevent drug use and help individuals get treatment and maintain recovery. One major effort has been to equip law enforcement personnel and community members with naloxone, often referred to by its trade name Narcan, a medication that can temporarily reverse the effects of an opiate overdose.

Highlighted below are snapshots of the naloxone programs created by Coronato and Morrissey, ways for prosecutors to get involved in their jurisdictions, and useful links to learn more about the heroin and opioid epidemic facing our country.

JOSEPH D. CORONATO — OCEAN COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE (NJ)

The heroin and prescription painkiller epidemic has been particularly evident in Ocean County, New Jersey. About an hour away from Philadelphia — a major import zone for heroin from Mexico — Ocean County has some of the purest and cheapest heroin. In 2013, during Coronato's first year as county prosecutor, there were 112 drug overdose fatalities, the majority of which involved heroin.

In April 2014, after New Jersey's Overdose Prevention Act took effect,³ Coronato partnered with the New Jersey Attorney General's Office and the Department of Health to create the Law Enforcement Narcan Program, a naloxone pilot program.⁴ The program used drug forfeiture money to purchase Narcan kits and distribute them to law enforcement personnel.⁵ The program also hosts informational sessions, and distributes Narcan to members of the community.

After Narcan is administered, the patients are taken to the hospital, where they are screened and monitored by health officials. After recovering from an overdose, the patients receive counseling from overdose specialists and

¹ "Attorney General Holder Announces Plans for Federal Law Enforcement Personnel to Begin Carrying Naloxone," U.S. Dept. of Justice, July 31, 2014, <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-holder-announces-plans-federal-law-enforcement-personnel-begin-carrying>.

² *Id.*; "Increases in Heroin Overdose Deaths—28 States, 2010 to 2012, Ctrs. for Disease Control & Prevention," October 3, 2014, <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6339a1.htm>.

³ N.J. Stat. Ann. § 24:6J-1 (West 2015).

⁴ "Narcan," Ocean County Prosecutor's Office, <http://oceancountyprosecutor.org/narcan/>.

⁵ Now, law enforcement agencies use their own resources to purchase the kits.

Carolyn Brodbeck is a recent graduate of Washington & Lee University School of Law.

may be referred to a treatment program in the area. Two such facilities have become active in the program and offer immediate consultations and detoxification programs. Thus, the patients have a clear direction of where they can go for help, regardless of their health insurance coverage.

The program has already begun saving lives through overdose reversals since its implementation last year. “In Ocean County during 2014, 129 victims of heroin were given a chance to choose a path away from addiction, and loved ones have been spared the grief that comes with so many tragic overdose deaths,” Coronato said. “It’s encouraging that law enforcement in New Jersey and beyond has chosen to follow our lead in equipping patrol officers with this lifesaving antidote.”

Coronato continued, “In Ocean County, New Jersey, we are now looking to expand upon the success of our Narcan program by changing emergency room overdose response protocols to give those who have had reverse treatment options aimed at breaking the crippling cycle of addiction.” More information about the program can be found at: <http://oceancountyprosecutor.org/naloxone/>.

MICHAEL W. MORRISSEY — NORFOLK DISTRICT ATTORNEY’S OFFICE (MA)

In 2012, 668 Massachusetts residents died from unintentional fatal opioid overdoses—a 90 percent increase from 2000.⁶ Norfolk County was not an exception; police estimate that there were 64 suspected opioid deaths in the county in 2013 and 91 in 2014. As the party responsible for investigating these unattended deaths,⁷ Morrissey became concerned and decided to take action.

Using drug forfeiture funds, which are divided among Massachusetts investigating agencies at the close of narcotics cases for uses including crime prevention, Morrissey has provided 900 naloxone kits to police and fire departments in the area. In 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health had chosen Quincy, a city in Norfolk County, to pilot the state’s Opioid Overdose Prevention and Reversal Project. Thus, the Quincy Police Department became the first department in the United States to have every police car equipped with naloxone, which has resulted in the reversal of hundreds of overdoses. Morrissey

expanded that project countywide. On March 26, 2014, he organized a training session on how to properly administer naloxone.

Before the naloxone project, in early 2011, Morrissey developed a Drug Take Back Initiative, a countywide program to educate residents on how to safely store and dispose of unwanted medication. The initiative’s goal is to prevent this disease, as addiction specialists say that many with substance use disorders take their first pain pill straight from their family’s medicine cabinet. As part of the initiative, drug take-back boxes have been installed in 25 of the 27 communities, and are always available for residents to dispose of unused medication without question.

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“We recognize that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem, but there are some cost-effective things we can do to save lives and prevent the diversion of these drugs,” Morrissey said. “We are fortunate in Norfolk County to have police chiefs who will work with us and make these efforts successful.”

For both the naloxone and Drug Take Back projects, Morrissey has worked in conjunction with various individuals, government agencies, corporations, community organizations, and nonprofit organizations. He has also petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to make naloxone available over the counter. More information on Morrissey’s efforts can be found at: <http://www.mass.gov/da/norfolk/prevention.html>.

⁶ “Findings of the Opioid Task Force and Department of Public Health Recommendations on Priorities for Investments in Prevention, Intervention, Treatment and Recovery,” Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health, June 10, 2014, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/208741>.

⁷ District attorneys in Massachusetts are the investigative authority into all unattended deaths. See Massachusetts Gen. Laws ch. 38, § 4 (2015), available at <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleVI/Chapter38/Section4>

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

“Naloxone saves lives, plain and simple. The use of naloxone by our nation’s law enforcement and first responder agencies can be a crucial step to help individuals with substance use disorders begin a healthy life in recovery. I commend Joseph Coronato and Michael Morrissey for expanding the use of naloxone and access to treatment services. It is always encouraging to see prosecutors and health officials working together to address the overdose crisis affecting so many communities,” said Michael Botticelli, director of National Drug Control Policy.

Prosecutors can partner with community groups to implement programs preventing drug use and substance use disorders and help people maintain their recovery, similar to those in Ocean County and Norfolk County. The Ocean County Prosecutor’s Office has complete policies and protocols, which it is willing to share with other prosecutors across the country. Contact information may be found through the following link: <http://oceancountyprosecutor.org/contact/>.

Naloxone, an opiate antidote, comes in injection and nasal forms. Photo by Michele McDonald, courtesy of msnbc.com



Helpful Links

Information

- Naloxone:
 - <http://stopoverdoseil.org/narcan.html>
 - <http://harmreduction.org/issues/overdose-prevention/overview/overdose-basics/understanding-naloxone/>
- Naloxone training videos:
 - <http://www.mass.gov/norfolkda/substanceabuse.html>;
 - <http://www.naloxoneinfo.org/run-program/training-videos>

Statutes and Legislation

- Good Samaritan and Naloxone Bill Status Report—Carryover 2014 and Special Sessions:
 - <http://www.namsdl.org/library/7D6755F0-65BE-F4BB-A1880D304C59DAE0/>
- Good Samaritan Overdose Prevention Statutes:
 - <http://www.namsdl.org/library/16CF23D6-19B9-E1C5-31E4C6E7BAE2599E/>
- Naloxone Access Statutes:
 - <http://www.namsdl.org/library/16CE4FDC-19B9-E1C5-3175B29881A03FBC/>

Toolkits

- Bureau of Justice Assistance’s Law Enforcement Naloxone Toolkit:
 - www.bja.gov/naloxone
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Opioid Overdose Toolkit:
 - http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4742/Overdose_Toolkit.pdf