

Law

Enforcement

Why Am I Needed?

In the last several years there has been an increase in opioid overdose deaths. Today, the leading cause of accidental death is overdose, surpassing automobile accidents. The overdose death rates will continue to climb unless communities come together with law enforcement to share the burden of stopping this trend.

Currently, the criminal activity associated with prescription drug misuse/abuse/diversion/overdose absorbs a great deal of law enforcement manpower. Communities that have increased education and awareness about the signs and symptoms of prescription medication problems can assist police through tip lines and 911 calls when citizens are informed. Criminal efforts to divert and sell narcotics can be stifled by storing medications correctly and disposing of them properly. Communities following the Project Lazarus motto of “Take Correctly, Store Securely, Dispose Properly, and Never Share” can have a significant impact on crime rates.

What Do I Need to Know?

As first responders, law enforcement may potentially be called to overdose situations. Therefore, it is important to know the key signs of an opioid overdose. Look for very slow and shallow breathing, blue or black fingernails or lips, clammy or pale skin, limp body, unconscious, unresponsive to being stimulated (calling out their name or rubbing knuckles on their breastbone). The quick recognition of an opioid overdose with the administration of naloxone will save lives.

Naloxone is a medication that can be administered to reverse opioid overdoses. In April 2013, the Good Samaritan Law & Naloxone Access Law, SB20, was passed in North Carolina. This bill provides immunity from criminal or civil liability for the individual administering naloxone to reverse an overdose. Furthermore, SB20 provides limited immunity for the individual seeking medical assistance by calling 911, even if there are small amounts of drugs or paraphernalia at the scene of the overdose. Similar laws have also been passed in multiple other states.

The President’s drug policy includes reform to the criminal justice system to “break the cycle of drug use, crime, and incarceration, while protecting public safety.” This is a tall order that will require anecdotal information from the law enforcement community on effective interventions and naloxone use. By broadening the perspective of law enforcement to view prescription drug misuse/abuse/diversion/overdose as a public health epidemic as stipulated in the President’s Drug Control Reformation, law enforcement can recognize the need to join forces with community coalitions working to bring a comprehensive and holistic approach to the issue.

Youth parties now include pharmaceuticals. When responding to a probable overdose emergency, you may not have information regarding what the victim has taken. Trainings about pharmaceuticals, pill recognition, and potentially hazardous combinations of substances are vital for all First Responders. There are phone apps that can assist with this.*



What Needs To Be Done?



- Understand that naloxone saves lives. Develop a naloxone program for law enforcement departments, which includes training in the administration of naloxone, rescue kits that contain naloxone, laws pertaining to overdose prevention like the Good Samaritan Law (NC SB20), standing orders for naloxone, and quick recognition of overdose symptoms.
- Educate citizens to be vital partners in crime prevention; crimes can be prevented by securing medications in lockable containers.
- Implement pill take back events coinciding with the DEA twice per year and establish permanent pill disposal sites. Visit www.projectpilldrop.org for disposal sites and more information.
- Know the signs and symptoms of prescription medications misuse/abuse/diversion/overdose.
- Train community police officers on how student populations transport prescription drugs through school gateways. Students who share personal or family prescription medication with friends and family should be educated about the legal and health risks of this practice.
- Learn pill recognition and lethal combinations, for example benzodiazepines taken with opiates can cause respiratory arrest and death. A phone application is available for assistance. Philip Thornton, CEO of Drugs.com, stated, "The app will be especially useful for law enforcement agencies and emergency workers requiring quick access to Pill Identification tool without being reliant on an Internet connection."*
- Collaborate with local emergency departments, as well as behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment organizations within communities to further assist those individuals with substance use disorders and mental illness that incarceration, on average, will not address.
- Create tip lines for citizens who want to report criminal activity anonymously.
- Use billboards, television, and radio media to increase public awareness.
- Take Correctly, Store Securely, Dispose Properly, Never Share.***[™]

Resources

Information on additional training, grants, pill boxes, and other material is available at www.naddi.org

Information pertaining to average street prices for prescription medications may be found at <http://streetrx.com>

Operation Medicine Drop:
www.ncdoi.com/OSFM/SafeKids/sk_OperationMedicineDrop.asp

NC Good Samaritan and Naloxone Legislation:
http://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/qcyvh5/NC-overdose-prevention-naloxone.pdf

<http://openstates.org/nc/bills/2013/SB20/documents/NCD00022391/>

US Naloxone Legislation:
http://www.networkforphl.org/_asset/qz5pvn/network-naloxone-10-4.pdf

For more information
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*Retrieved from <http://blog.drugs.com/2010/09/new-pill-identifier-app-for-the-ipad-iphone-and-ipod-touch/>
App: Drugs.com Medication Guide is available for download with Android and iPhone.