



Katy Nesbitt / For The Observer

During a meeting with Wallowa County law enforcement and medical staff Rep. Greg Walden, left, was shown the boxes and bags full of prescription pills, many of them opiates, turned into the sheriff's office voluntarily over the last six months.

## OPIOID

Continued from Page 1A which he said illustrates the issue of over-prescribing happening across the nation.

Kohlepp said law enforcement previously mixed the pills with vinegar and put them in a dumpster, but mailing them or an officer driving them across the state is a much better system.

"This is a valuable community service," Nic Powers, CEO of

Winding Waters Clinic in Enterprise, said. "Even clinic staff members are bringing their prescriptions down."

As an officer who often deals with drug use on the job, Kohlepp said he asks people what they are using and what they have mixed together. He said a lot of homespun chemistry takes place, sometimes using household chemicals.

Because many drug users mix their own concoctions at home,

Rogers said officers are no longer field testing drugs — everything goes to a lab.

Rogers said to the best of his knowledge only one person has died of an opiate overdose in the county, but Dr. Liz Powers of Winding Waters Clinic said the county's emergency medical service personnel have frequently administered Narcan to patients, a drug used to reverse an opioid overdose.

All of the Wallowa County

Sheriff's Office and Enterprise Police Department vehicles carry Narcan, and according to Nic Powers, Enterprise and Joseph schools keep the drug on hand.

Mike Farley, pharmacist at Winding Waters Clinic, said distributing Narcan to officers and schools was an idea pushed by a resident at the clinic from Oregon Health Sciences University, Nick West.

"Nick looked at our opioid rate, and (saw that) Wallowa County was in the top five in the state for opioid prescriptions," Farley said. "Two hundred and forty-one prescriptions were written per 1,000 county residents."

Walden asked if that number could be skewed because of Wallowa County's high rate of retired residents. Nic Powers told him the county does indeed have the highest median age in the state at 59.

Wallowa County also has a very high number of tourists each year at close to one million. Meg Bowen, quality director at Winding Waters, said that's why it is important to have Narcan available around the community.

"Visitors bring their addictions and their prescriptions. We need to go anywhere we can with these life-saving drugs," she said.

County physicians are prescribing alternatives to prescription pain relief, Bowen said, like acupuncture, massage yoga, behavior and mental health counseling and a pain clinic run by Wallowa County Center for Wellness, the mental health facility.

Walden has long championed legislation to combat the nation's opioid crisis. Over the past two weeks the House of Representatives has passed dozens of bills with bipartisan support, included in his Support for Patients and Communities Act, which passed the House Sept. 14.

According to Walden's website, this legislation will help overall efforts to advance treatment and recovery initiatives, improve prevention, protect communities and bolster efforts to fight deadly illicit synthetic drugs like opioid fentanyl.

In addition to numerous other provisions, the bill will incentivize non-opioid pain treatment and make it easier to locate and track federal grants, streamline the Food and Drug Administration's tools to intercept illicit drugs, ensure hospitals develop follow-up protocols when patients are discharged following an opioid overdose and work with states to improve the education,

## TRAFFICKING

Continued from Page 1A legislation to combat human trafficking.

According to the Polaris project, an organization specifically designed to help stop trafficking, "Human trafficking is a form of modern slavery, a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that denies freedom to 20.9 million people around the world. And no matter where you live, chances are it's happening nearby. From the girl forced into prostitution at a truck stop to the man discovered in a restaurant kitchen, stripped of his passport and held against his will. All trafficking victims share one essential experience: the loss of freedom."

Walden has been working toward shutting down websites that promote trafficking.

"It's a huge problem," he said.

Union County Sheriff Boyd Rasmussen and UCSO Deputy Dane Jensen were on hand to speak to the law enforcement side of the issue.

"We don't see a lot of it right now in Union County," Rasmussen said.

The sheriff said Jensen has specific training in domestic situations and is the lead domestic violence investigator for the sheriff's office.

Jensen said he knows of at least one human trafficking case years ago that involved a minor.

He said they worked with Umatilla County and the Federal Bureau of Investigation "to try to get (the victim) out."

That challenge was a topic of discussion at Wednesday's meeting. Victims have a hard time trusting law enforcement and will not come forward to ask them for help.

GRH Emergency Room Nurse Manager April Brock said she was asked to come to the meeting and give her input about what she sees in the hospital's emergency room. She said she has done some research and found ERs often have contact with victims of trafficking due to injuries sustained in the trade.

"(The victims) can't always speak (up) though," Brock said.

She said research shows

victims of trafficking visit the ER an average of 10 times before they are able to escape their situation.

Brock said she is legally obligated to ask all patients who go through the ER a series of questions, including whether they feel safe at home. She said ER staff often go through those questions quickly out of habit, and feels there needs to be training for ER staff to learn to spot victims of trafficking. She has requested training to show them how to screen and what to look for.

Even when she believes someone is a victim of domestic violence, they are often accompanied by the abuser and are not able to give an honest answer.

April Oswald, of Wallowa County, said she was a victim of sexual abuse and human trafficking throughout her childhood and was in attendance to tell her story.

She said no amount of training will help the ER staff — or law enforcement — because trafficking victims don't trust anyone. "(With) our background, it's hard to trust people," she said.

She said the most beneficial thing to do is provide resources so victims can help themselves and be able

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— Polaris Project

to talk to those who are specifically trained to help with trafficking victims.

Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) was also at the meeting and talked about the passage of his bill, which calls for posters to be put up at rest areas along Interstate 5 and Interstate 84 in bathroom stalls with phone numbers of resources to help trafficking victims.

Oswald agreed placing resources like that in rest areas, restaurants and truck stops would be helpful for victims.

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage said she would like to see if the county could pay for posters or stickers that have the same resources to be put up in similar areas. Hansell said the posters

on I-84 and I-5 will be going up in the winter.

Union County Commissioner elect Matt Scarfo, who will step into his new role in January, said he would be willing to put up the phone number for the national human trafficking hotline in the bathroom stalls of his restaurants

and believes other business owners would be willing to do the same.

Walden said human trafficking happens everywhere — even in small communities like those in Union County. People just don't know about it.

"No matter what town you're in, it's there," Walden said.

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