

Heroin: Deaths hit law enforcement, community hard

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A major reason behind the surge of heroin is the prevalence of prescription drug abuse.

Bergin said the flood of prescription pills on society has led to addiction. Once people start illegally abusing prescription drugs, their dealers often transition them to the cheaper option of heroin.

In some cases, a person will have a legitimate injury and be placed on opiates for pain management and then over time transition to heroin. The CDC has reported that some of the greatest increases in heroin use have occurred among women and people with private insurance and higher incomes, demographic groups that have not historically abused the drug.

"The availability is out there and they can only afford the pills for so long," Bergin said.

Solutions

As for solutions to the heroin epidemic, Bergin relates the drug problem to weeds in a yard.

Bergin wants all Clatsop County communities to be drug-free, just like people want their yards to be weed-free.

Law enforcement agencies work to keep up on the drug problem by focusing on a mixture of enforcement and treatment. A total of 150 people have been convicted of possessing heroin in Clatsop County since 2010, according to figures from the District Attorney's Office.

Many of those convicted are eligible for drug court, which Bergin said has become a successful deterrent to keep people from relapsing.

Heroin is especially dangerous because it is so addictive. Someone can use the drug one time and be hooked. Unlike prescription pills that come in measured amounts, a dose of heroin may not be exact or could be mixed with other substances. The variability leads to overdoses.

"Not all drugs are deadly, but this definitely has the ability to end someone's life," Halverson said.



Ted Ames



Tom Bergin

Heroin overdose deaths have ranged from about one to three a year in Clatsop County over the past decade, according to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office. Officials say the number of deaths and convictions from heroin may actually be higher than reported since the drug may be a factor in other cases.

Trying to save lives

The Astoria Fire Department has responded to many calls involving heroin over the past few years.

In 2014, the fire department responded to seven calls specifically referencing heroin. Three of those were overdoses and four were withdrawals.

This year to date, the fire department has had six heroin-related calls. Three were for overdoses and three were for withdrawals.

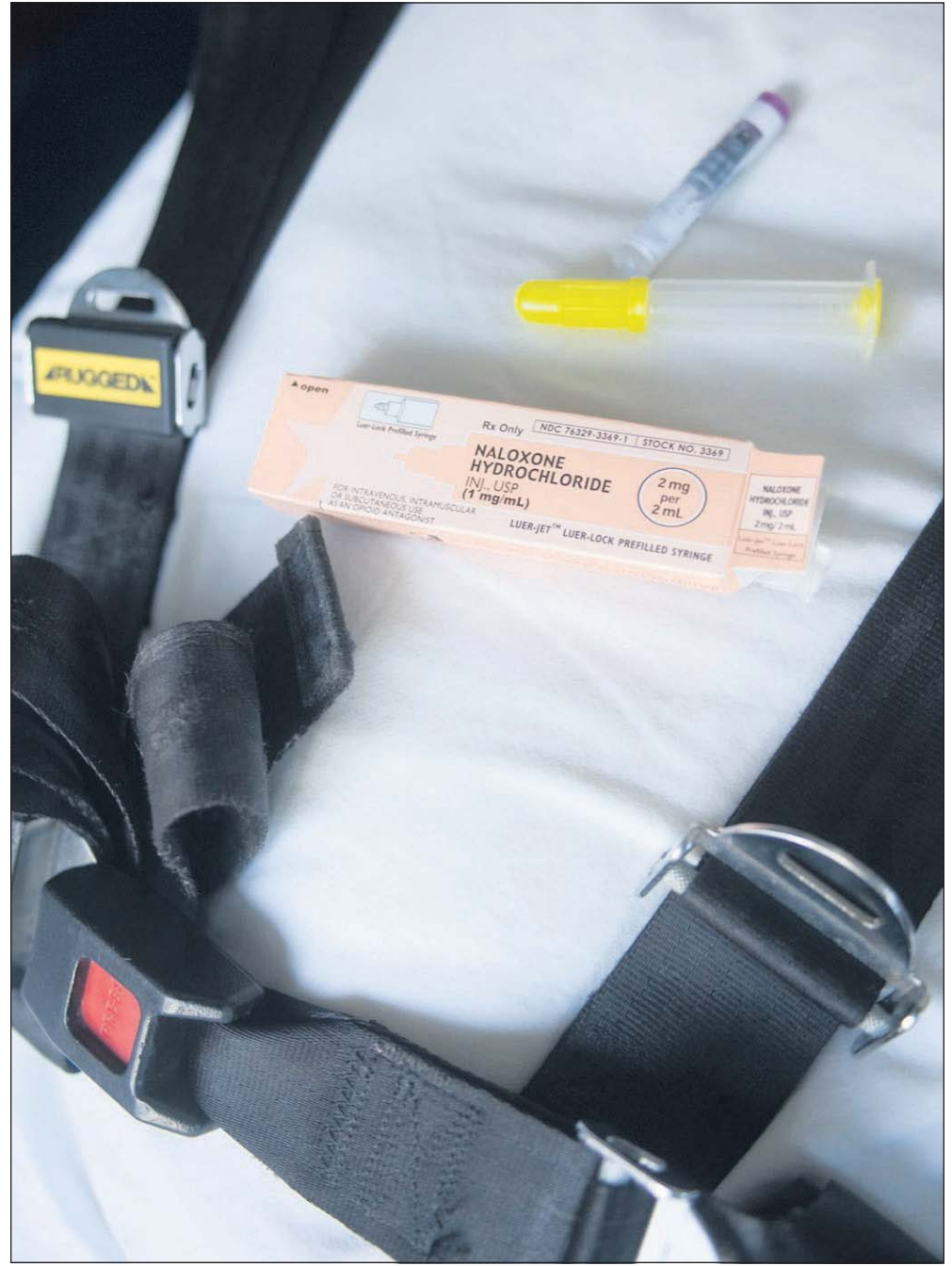
Astoria Fire Chief Ted Ames said first responders have been able to prevent heroin deaths by using the anti-overdose drug, naloxone, which can counter the effects of opiates. Oregon law changed in 2013 to allow wider access to naloxone.

Ames said his department and others around Clatsop County have used naloxone well before it was made more widely available. The drug can be administered through a nasal mist, injection in a muscle or through an IV. Although it saves lives, naloxone can cause serious side effects, including seizures.

"Sometimes people come out of it really upset," Ames said. "It's not without consequences." Unfortunately, not everyone can be saved.

The overdose deaths of the pregnant woman and the young man, who was a participant in the Clatsop County drug court, hit law enforcement and the community hard.

"I've worked around here for quite a while," Halverson said. "I have to tell too many mothers that their kid died because of a drug overdose. These young people have so much in front of them. To see that potential go away because of a drug overdose is really sad."



Daily Astorian/File Photo

Narcan, also called naloxone hydrochloride, has been used by medical personnel for years to counteract the effects of opiates such as heroin.

Coberly: He is one of 12 students in work experience programs

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loss over the years of many vocational opportunities in school. He said there are plenty of businesses in the region that could create similar trades-based opportunities for youth, and he would like to reach out more to students who are struggling and need

hard-working role models.

Luke Colvin, another co-founder of Buoy Beer, said it was always his intention to give back through his business.

"There's been a big problem in Astoria with our youth, retaining our kids here, and there's not a lot of really great job opportu-

nities," Colvin said. "Part of what was behind it was we wanted to expose kids at a younger age to a growing industry that is in this community here. There's such an expansion of the craft industry and fermentation in general in the Northwest."

Colvin said he found willing participants for the experi-

ence through the high school's administration.

"A program like this provides a unique and useful career exploration opportunity," said counselor Andrew Fick, who helped review applications from several students interested in the program. "There are also post-secondary programs that

would build upon this kind of experience."

Fick said Coberly is one of 12 students in work experience programs at various job sites. Other students shadow professionals, take classes at Columbia Memorial Hospital and learn about various careers during senior projects.

"This is certainly something that is outside the box," Astoria Principal Lynn Jackson said of Coberly's experience.

It's ironic, he said, that education is moving back toward an apprenticeship model hundreds, if not thousands, of years old.

—Edward Stratton

Wauna Credit Union Included In List Of 100 Best Nonprofits To Work For In Oregon



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Wauna Credit Union has been recognized by Oregon Business Magazine as one of the 100 Best Nonprofits To Work For in Oregon. This is the Oregon Business Magazine's 7th Annual Top 100 List, which analyzed employee survey data compiled earlier this year from over 5,000 employees throughout Oregon.

"We are thrilled by this wonderful recognition," reports Sharon Borgardt, Chief Human Resources Officer for Wauna CU, "especially since the ranking is based on a survey comparing our employees' level of pride and satisfaction to those of other similar employers." Wauna Credit Union compared especially favorable to its peers in the categories of Management & Communication, Benefits and Compensation, Sustainable Practices, and Career Development & Learning.

"Much of the success of our organization is based on the amazing service our staff provides to over 20,000 local, member-owners," says Robert Blumberg, CEO. "As an employer, we truly value our employees as the most important assets of our organization. We strive to provide a work environment that is positive, rewarding, healthy, and fun! The enthusiasm of our employees is conveyed each day through helpful and courteous service to our member-owners."

Wauna CU has earned recognition as a Top 100 Best Green Workplace in Oregon for several years due to its commitment to sustainable practices.

Pictured, L to R: Sara Kulp, Sharon Borgardt, Marc Silva, Robert Blumberg, John Moore, Gina Dines, Pam Weller, Debi Smiley, Danae Passmore, David Merrell.

