
Major Dale Soltis: 'We take an oath to save lives'

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The Stark County Sheriff's Office staff will begin distributing Narcan to at-risk inmates departing the jail, as part of a pilot program.

CANTON Narcan is being provided to Stark County Jail inmates identified as being at-risk of overdosing on opioids upon their discharge from custody.

The Narcan distribution is an extension of grant-funded program called the Prescription Drug Overdose Pilot Project which was launched at the beginning of this year at the county jail. The grant is from the Ohio Department of Health. The Narcan distribution is scheduled to start today. Departing inmates who have been assessed as being at-risk of overdosing will be offered two doses of Narcan. It will be given in the form of nasal spray.

"We have been giving education (to inmates) up until now," said Maj. Dale Soltis of the Stark County Sheriff's Office. "We finally got the Narcan in. It will be administered through our medical contractor. We take an oath to save lives. We are not in position to judge whose life is worth saving. It is a step toward getting the individuals the help they need. There is no doubt that Stark County is facing this epidemic head-on."

Narcan, or Naloxone, is an opiate antidote. Opioids are drugs that act on the brain and nervous system to relieve pain. Continued use of opioids can result in addiction. Along with heroin, some other opioids are morphine, codeine,

oxycodone, methadone and Vicodin.

Partnering with the county sheriff's staff on the Narcan distribution project is CommQuest, a nonprofit social-service agency which provides substance abuse treatment in this county.

Some of the inmates "are at a high risk of overdoing when they are released from jail," said Keith Hochadel, president and chief executive officer of CommQuest. "By creating this program we are adding another tool to our tool box."

During 2016, there were 118 unintentional drug overdose cases in Stark County, according to the county Health Department. The county Health Department also is a partner in the pilot project to combat opioid overdosing. It is the Stark County Health Department that is administering the Prescription Drug Overdose Pilot Project grant program locally.

Each inmate is assessed for drug addiction when they enter the county jail.

During a media session Tuesday about the Narcan distribution program, the question came up that giving people Narcan might be considered enabling the addict.

"I don't consider that to be enabling," Hochadel said. "We know that recovery saves lives."

Another aspect of the project is directing the at-risk individuals to sites in the community where Narcan is available. These are known as Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) sites.

"We have been able to identify a number of locations where people can pick up Narcan kits," Hochadel said.

Among some Project DAWN sites are Crisis Intervention and Recovery Center, any CommQuest outpatient site and the Regional Center for Opiate Recovery in Massillon.

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