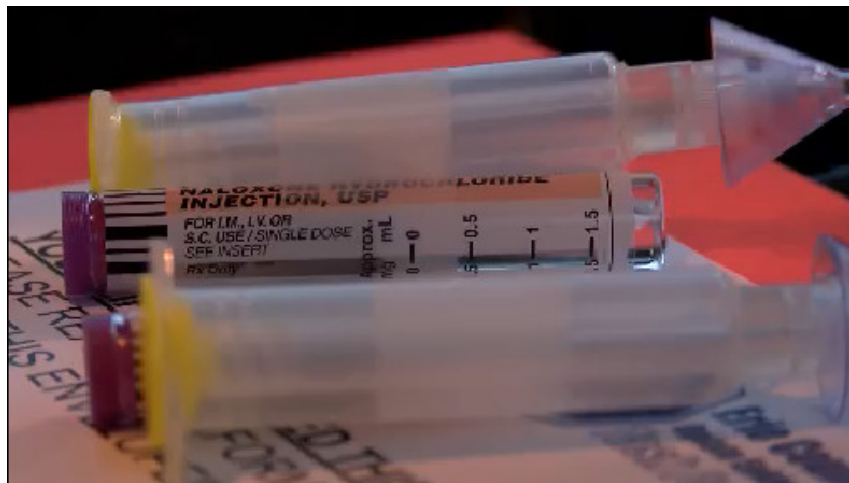




New initiative offers officers opportunities to talk with those who've overdosed

By Ali Ingersoll, News 4 Reporter (<http://wivb.com/author/wivbaliingersoll/>)

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CHEEKTOWAGA, N.Y. (WIVB) — “One of these days we’re not going to get there soon enough,” said Lt. Brian Gould with the Cheektowaga Police Department.

We are tagging along with the officer as he is patrolling around the area. While in the car, a call for shoplifting comes from dispatch.

“We’re seeing more crimes like that because people are trying to afford their habits,” said Lt. Gould. “People who are addicted are having a hard time holding a job.”

Around fifteen minutes later, new information comes from dispatch – the person arrested for shoplifting has drug paraphernalia on them. It’s a crack pipe. The lieutenant says it’s usually something related to heroin use.

As he roves around the suburban town, he is ready to respond to any call – especially those for overdoses.

“You’re thinking I have to get there safe. I have to get there fast because this person isn’t breathing.”

The longtime member of the police department keeps a bag in his backseat. It has two narcan kits and several pamphlets about resources available through the county. After using the narcan, the officer has to wait to see if it’ll kick in.

"It's tough to sit there and watch someone who is not breathing."

While he waits, he'll place the county information – which is in a bright orange envelope so it can't be missed – in plain view. After the narcan kicks in, the patient is taken to the hospital, evaluated, and released.

"And then no one talks to them again until they overdose again. We love having this tool [narcan] but it's frustrating when we're responding to the same person more than once."

Sometimes it's more than once in a day — that happened once in the last year in Cheektowaga, a man overdosed in the morning, was released from the hospital and overdosed again at night; the lieutenant doesn't know if he's clean now. Oftentimes, they're responding to the same people several times throughout the year. In 2017, Cheektowaga first responders administered more than 110 doses of narcan; 13 people they used it on were revived by it more than once.

"One person had it five times in the year. They're the people we're going after with our program."

The program the lieutenant is referring to is called the Overdose Prevention through Follow Up initiative. It's just being launched through the county. They received a grant to help Cheektowaga pilot this.

It works like this – a day after someone is revived from an overdose, the lieutenant and an Erie County counseling specialist return to that location, looking for the person. They talk with the person who overdosed about what happened and they tell them about narcan – they can provide training and doses of it if they'd like — and they also talk about medication assisted treatment programs. If the person agrees to go, they all go together, right then.

This initiative launched in September and so far, 19 people have sought out treatment.

"We've come up with something that seems to have positive results."

The lieutenant finds the results encouraging and hopes the program continues to be helpful.

"Yes, it's a choice to use drugs but addiction is a real illness they're struggling with and we just want to stop seeing people die."

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