

The Narcan Police

In response to an epidemic of heroin overdoses and a new law, Wayne takes action to save lives.

Chris Vergano Mayor, Wayne and James Clarke, Chief, Wayne Police Department

On May 22, 2014 at 5:00 p.m., a husband and wife returned to their Wayne Township home to find their 38 year old daughter lying on the bathroom floor not breathing. Beside her were a syringe and a tourniquet and fresh puncture marks were visible on her arm. It was evident to the officers who responded that she had overdosed on heroin.



Wayne Police Chief James Clarke, Officer Rick Hess and Mayor Chris Vergano. Officer Hess was the first officer in Passaic County to successfully use Narcan to revive a heroin overdose victim.

One officer went out to stand at the curb to await the paramedics. When they arrived the officer told them that the victim was in cardiac arrest, most likely due to a heroin overdose. The paramedics immediately administered Narcan to the victim. Within minutes she was breathing on her own. By the time she arrived at the hospital emergency room the victim was awake and talking. However, the outcome could have been very different. Had the paramedics been delayed—even by a couple of minutes—the woman would have suffered irreversible brain damage.

On September 3, 2014 at 6:00 p.m., our patrol officers working the night shift were the first officers in the department's history to be issued Narcan kits to carry while on patrol. These officers had completed training in the proper use of the Narcan Kits for opiate overdoses.

The very next day a patrol officer used his kit to save the life of a man who was barely able to breath and surrounded with drug paraphernalia. It was the first time in Passaic County that

a police officer used Narcan.

Initially, many thought that this rescue, coming so quickly after the start of the Narcan program was a fluke. That thought process was proven wrong when on September 7 officers once again saved a man with two more doses of Narcan in motel room. He, too, was quickly resuscitated. Sadly, overdose is becoming common.

From 2010 through 2013, New Jersey saw close to 4,300 drug-related deaths. According to the Center for Disease Control, deaths from overdoses have been rising over the past two decades to become the leading cause of injury death in the United States. Injury death is caused by an act carried out on purpose by oneself or by another person(s), with the goal of injuring or killing. Every day in the United States, 113 people die from overdoses, and another 6,748 are treated in emergency departments for the misuse or abuse of drugs. Nearly nine out of 10 poisoning deaths are caused by drugs.



Narcan Works Narcan is the brand name for Nalaxone, which is an opiate antagonist. Simply, it works by reversing the effects of opiate-based drugs and medications. Once the opiate effects are reversed a person will experience improved breathing and responsiveness. Narcan works only on opiate-based drug overdoses.

Narcan will not stop an individual from using drugs or becoming an addict.

Narcan is administered by spraying the solution in the overdose victim's nose. A small nasal atomizer is attached to the Narcan syringe which creates the mist that is sprayed into the nasal passage. Once the Narcan is absorbed into the blood stream it disconnects the opiates from the receptors that they attach to within the body. This separation reverses the opiate effects on the person.

Depending on the vendor and the type of kit purchased (single dose or double dose), the cost of the drug varies from \$25 to \$50.

Liability Considerations Immunity is granted under New Jersey Public Law 2013, Chapter 46, which is also known as the "Overdose Prevention Act" (the Act). The act provides immunity for civil and criminal liability for non-health care professionals who administer in an emergency, naloxone hydrochloride, or any other similarly-acting drug approved by the United States Food and Drug Admin-

istration, to a person believed in good faith to be experiencing an opioid overdose. The Act also provides civil, criminal, and professional disciplinary immunity for health care professionals and pharmacists involved in prescribing or dispensing the opioid antidote in accordance with the Act.

The Value of a Life There have been many arguments on whether or not police officers should be carrying and administering Narcan for opiate overdoses. Opponents have expressed concerns that taxpayers should not be asked to fund a program that caters to those who

are addicted to drugs. Proponents of the program say that it is the duty of police officers to render aid and preserve life.

Is administering Narcan any different than giving oxygen to an asthma victim or using a defibrillator on a cardiac arrest victim? The real question is what if the overdose victim were one of our own family members? Would we want police officers to administer Narcan and do everything possible to save his or her life?

My co-author Wayne Police Chief James Clarke said that "after spending seven years assigned to the Narcotics Bureau as an undercover detective I am fully aware of the pitfalls with drug abuse. The Narcan program will provide lifesaving measures for first responders attending to those caught up in the heroin epidemic."

The Passaic County Prosecutor, Camelia M. Valdes, said "I am proud that the partnership and efforts amongst the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office and Chiefs of Police have saved lives almost lost to heroin use. To date, the use of Narcan has saved five lives in Passaic County; three in Wayne, one in Bloomingtondale, one in Ringwood and one in West Milford. We look forward to future saves and continued cooperation."

As Mayor of Wayne, I feel our residents expect us to do everything we can to serve and protect. Narcan is another tool that allows us to fulfill that obligation. 🚔

Dear Officers...

On September 13, 2014, the Wayne Police Department received a thank you letter from the mother of the male who received the first dose of Narcan in the restaurant bathroom. She started her letter by saying "Thank you for saving my son's life." She went on to express her gratitude and appreciation for the police officer's rescue efforts and for implementing the Narcan program. The mother also wrote that as a result of her son's near death experience, he has entered into a rehab program. She concluded her letter by saying "I am so thankful that he still has a chance to succeed in life." Regardless of anyone's stance on the matter, we can all agree that to this mother, \$25 is a small price to pay.