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Quincy drug abuse program wins praise

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The Patriot Ledger

Posted Jun 26, 2010 @ 12:00 PM

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QUINCY — A Quincy police program was lauded as a model for fighting heroin and prescription drug abuse during a presentation of the state’s opioid overdose prevention pilot program.

As of two weeks ago, all Quincy police cruisers are equipped with Narcan, a nasal spray that opens up oxygen paths and saves people in the throes of an overdose. Police officers, firefighters and EMTs in Quincy have been trained to use it.

“I think there’s going to be more and more national support for it ... Quincy’s really leading the way,” said Dr. Alexander Whalley, medical director for the state’s Opioid Overdose Prevention Pilot Program, during a presentation Friday at Granite Links Golf Club.

The presentation was organized by Impact Quincy, a nonprofit that fights drug use. The mayors of Quincy, Braintree and Weymouth were among about 80 attendees.

The state’s opiate overdose prevention program trains addicts, family members of addicts and treatment center workers in the use of Narcan, known clinically as naloxone and marketed under several trademarks, Narcan being the most popular.

Officials said the state pilot program has enrolled 6,299 people as of September 2007, and that Narcan provided through the program reversed at least 678 overdoses statewide.

In 66 percent of those cases, the Narcan was administered by a friend of the user. The rest were administered by family members or someone not known to the addict.

In Quincy, police officers have not yet had to use Narcan, said Lt. Detective Patrick Glynn, who heads the drug unit. Drug unit officers have had access to Narcan a little longer than patrolmen – about two months.

Still, state officials stressed addiction to opioids – a category of drugs that includes heroin, OxyContin and methadone – is an acutely serious problem in Quincy. State public health Commissioner John Auerbach said Quincy’s opiate overdose and hospitalization rates are high for a city of its size.

The philosophy behind the project is not universally lauded. Dana Martinson of Weymouth spoke up after a portion of the presentation and said the program allows addicts to sustain drug use, and crimes tied to it like larceny, for a longer period.

“It’s killing our kids, and we’re talking about Band-Aids,” Martinson said.

Several members of the audience responded, including Whalley, who said the program will have an effect on addiction rates.

“People are dying and we can prevent it, that should be enough,” Whalley said. “We really can treat addiction. People will get better. Not every one understands that.”

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