

CR-TTAC January 2019 Newsletter

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Note from the Director

This month we turn our attention to the role of law enforcement in responding to opiate overdoses. I was stunned to hear that for the first time ever, one is more likely to die of an opiate overdose than be killed in a car accident. This is a staggering fact and we are therefore proud to feature the prevention and outreach work of our partners at the Watertown Police Department. Combining forces with their JDP clinician, Watertown officers are trying to combat the overdose epidemic with life-saving, harm reduction strategies.

I hope you enjoy reading more about their efforts in this month's newsletter.

Sincerely,

Sarah Abbott Ph.D.
Jail Diversion Program Director

Latest News

The Nation's Opiate Epidemic is certainly not new news but continues to be a serious and unrelenting concern for communities across the country. CNN recently reported statistics from the National Safety Council's (NSC) analysis of 2017 preventable injury and fatality data and the results are shocking. This 2017 data shows that for the first time ever, "the odds of accidentally dying from an opiate overdose in the United States are now greater than those of dying in an automobile accident." The NSC reported specifically that the lifetime odds of dying via accidental overdose are 1 in 96; in addition to surpassing the odds of dying in a car accident, these odds are higher than accidental death from falls, pedestrian incidents, drowning and fires.

The public health crisis that opiates have created, touches us all. Many of us have lost friends, family members and people we serve, to an opiate overdose. Most of the police departments we partner with, have responded to the opiate crisis with important initiatives to connect individuals who overdose with treatment, while taking criminal charges off the table. In addition, Advocates has recovery coaches that our co-response clinicians are able to refer individuals to, post-overdose. Services provided by recovery coaches include support, resources and linkages to treatment.

[Report On National Safety Council Data](#)



How Watertown Police are Fighting the Opiate Epidemic

Lt. Daniel Unsworth leads the opiate initiative at the Watertown Police Department and we recently spoke to him about the work he and his officers are doing to help battle this issue.

Watertown Officials first realized opiates were causing a problem in their community in 2015, Unsworth reported, "in 2014 we had 1 fatal overdose but by the end of March 2015 – we had 3. At that point we knew something had changed. We later understood fentanyl was getting introduced to the opioids in town and the drugs were just more potent. By the end of 2015, we had 9 fatal overdoses." This represents a 900% increase over 12 months.

The Watertown Police Department initially responded to the opiate crisis by joining forces with the Town Council's Health and Human Services subcommittee. As partners, they embarked upon creating a task force which Unsworth reports was "extremely helpful because we had many heads coming together to share ideas. We learned from physicians, people in recovery, parents, other representatives from treatment facilities, the school department and clergy."



Lt. Unsworth and Watertown's Opiate Task Force are shown above; the task force includes members of the School Department, Wayside Youth and Family Services, Improbable Players, Smart Recovery, School Committee, Board of Health, Health Department, Fire Department, Town Council, the MGH Bridge Clinic, as well as people in recovery and parents of people in recovery.

Lt. Unsworth relayed that in the beginning stages of their efforts, it was not as easy as they anticipated to get the community involved in their initiative. "We thought we could hold a few public events to make 'everyone' in Watertown aware that they need to acknowledge this issue, and keep an eye on their friends and family. We pictured hundreds of people coming to awareness events. We quickly learned that groups of 50 people from the community at such events was a 'win.'"

Unsworth also spoke about the challenge of getting buy-in from officers to look at substance use in a different way and that they had to convince

officers to not think of someone using substances as, "just as a person who might be committing thefts on their beat, but as someone who has probably had a few bad breaks and needs help. Infusing empathy into the equation has been important."

Since the beginning of their efforts in 2015, Watertown PD has made a lot of progress. "Our officers understand what approach we need to take and they have exhibited much more patience and empathy – making follow-up a lot easier. We have developed great ties to treatment providers, so we know who to call for help when we have a person who is willing to seek treatment," says Unsworth. In addition, they have been engaging the community to help, "lessen the stigma and hopefully make it easier for families to request assistance."



Lt. Unsworth is pictured here speaking to the Watertown Community at the task force's "Erase the Stigma" event in October 2015.

[News Story on Watertown's "Erase the Stigma" Event](#)

Watertown PD are now responding to calls for opiate overdoses armed with Narcan- an opiate antagonist that reverses an overdose if administered in time. Families in town are now able to access Narcan from the PD at no cost; to have on hand for their loved ones who may be using substances. "Our officers have been coached to be patient – even if we get push-back from an overdose victim. We are hoping they can pave

the way for the JDP clinician to step in, follow up and gently coax them to treatment," says Unsworth.

Data collected by Watertown officials shows a significant increase of opiate related overdoses since 2015:

2015 Opiate Related Overdoses: 36
2018 Opiate Related Overdoses: 50

However there has been a significant decrease in fatal overdoses since 2015 with a range in ages from 20-60 years old:

2015 Fatal Opiate Overdoses: 9
2018 Fatal Opiate Overdoses: 2

When asked what he believes is the reason for the decrease in fatal overdoses, Lt. Unsworth reported. "I think the biggest factor contributing to the drop was getting Narcan to the scene of these overdoses quickly."

2015 Narcan Uses by Police: 2
2018 Narcan Uses by Police: 21

Lt. Unsworth is so passionate about this work, that we asked what has been his proudest moment since embarking on this journey. He responded, "we are proud of each Narcan 'save' – there is nothing more important than preserving a life. We know we have impacted some individuals long term for the better – that's very satisfying. It's also very satisfying to talk to families and let them know what resources we have in place – they are usually very surprised and thankful for the support."

When asked if there was one thing he felt was important for our readers to know he said, "Narcan 'saves' are great but getting people healthy in the long term is a challenge. It's always a relief when we get a person in the door to treatment but setbacks occur and we have to understand that measuring success is not easy in this area."

Finally we asked Lt. Unsworth if other police departments could contact Watertown PD for help establishing their own opiate response initiatives and he had this to say, "we have learned a lot from other police agencies and we are thankful for that. We will certainly share any information we have with other agencies that are trying to improve their response to this issue as well."

We are thankful to Lt. Unsworth for sharing the efforts of the Watertown police department to combat the opiate crisis.

[Learn More about Advocates Addiction Recovery Services](#)

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Public Safety Trainings

We are currently holding the following monthly trainings:

Location: Hopkinton Police Department

February 13, 2019 from 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

March 13, 2019 from 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

April 10, 2019 from 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM

To learn more about the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Trainings, please visit: www.jaildiversion.org or email Katelyn Dehey

[Request More Information](#)

Jail Diversion Statistics

Arrest & ER Diversion Data to Date

Arrest Diversion

2,773

ER Diversions

2,071

**\$6,932,500 Estimated
Cost Savings**

**\$9,319,500 Estimated
Cost Savings**



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Advocates CR-TTAC
257 Ayer Rd
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