

Ebel: Preventing drug addiction the key to solving overdoses

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist Published 12:53 p.m. ET May 13, 2018



(Photo: Submitted photo)

During the recent Addiction Forum, co-hosted by the Newark Advocate, participants from many local public and non-profit agencies, recovering addicts, family members impacted by addiction, and other concerned residents, met to discuss the impacts, causes, and solutions to Licking County's addiction crisis.

It became clear from the conversations, that while Licking County has an opioid problem, evidenced by the overdose emergency responses and fatalities, opioids are just one drug in a broad spectrum of substances abused. In fact, those suffering from addiction are often using multiple drugs, and opioids like heroin, and especially fentanyl, are what triggers a critical overdose. Other drugs often have similarly devastating outcomes resulting from damage done over years of abuse, or from the consequences of poor decisions made while

under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Ohio's strategies to address the opioid problem focus both on opioid specific strategies, and on general addiction prevention and recovery initiatives.

Expanding access to naloxone, to reverse opioid overdose deaths, is a harm reduction strategy that aims to keep people alive, so that they have an opportunity to seek treatment and recovery. Project DAWN (Deaths Avoided with Naloxone) initiatives, like the one offered through the Licking County Health Department, have distributed thousands of naloxone kits to families and friends of those addicted to opioids, as well as law enforcement and first responders.

Creating pathways to treatment and recovery to assure that everyone has access to treatment, including medication assisted treatment, in combination with counseling, continues to be a priority. But, to be successful, additional support such as stable housing, employment services, and relapse prevention must be available to reinforce recovery efforts.

Participants in the Addiction Forum identified the need for treatment and recovery, but they also emphasized the importance of preventing drug use before it starts.

Ohio has made some progress in preventing new opioid abuse. The state has closed pill mills, improved prescription tracking and worked with the medical community to revise prescribing guidelines. Those guidelines now ensure pain interventions are available to patients who need it while also taking important steps to limit the number of opiate prescription medications that are diverted and sold on the street for illicit use.

Preventing drug and alcohol abuse, especially in youth, requires an investment in our prevention education. This includes addressing mental, emotional and behavioral disorders, equipping youth with positive coping skills to deal with stress and trauma and teaching peaceful conflict resolution methods to reduce youth drug use before it starts.

Start Talking! is Ohio's statewide youth drug prevention initiative that brings together proven prevention strategies to promote the importance of having drug-free conversations with our youth. Research shows that children whose parents, or other trusted adults, talk with them about the risks of drugs are up to 50 percent less likely to use drugs.

Licking County offers many prevention programs like the PAX Good Behavior Game - providing teachers with low-cost, proven evidence-based actions to introduce and reinforce positive behavior, Reward & Reminder -recognizing business owners and establishments that refused to sell alcohol or tobacco to minors, the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) which trains practitioners to provide parenting support to reduce child maltreatment, Pax-It Notes - recognizing the good things people do, Life Skills curriculums, and Generation RX – educating youth on medication safety.

Equipping our youth to cope with stresses, providing counseling and treatment for mental health disorders, reducing adverse childhood experiences (trauma), building self-esteem and resiliency, improving social skills, and encouraging physical activity will be an investment in our youth that isn't geared to increasing test scores, but to emphasize reducing risk factors and increasing the skills needed to live healthy and happy lives.

Submitted by Licking County Health Commissioner, Joe Ebel, R.S., M.S., M.B.A.

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