



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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Press Release

Working with Pharmacists to Save Lives

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Norfolk County officials are determined to eliminate the rising number of prescription drug overdose deaths in Norfolk County. Last year, 64 people died in Norfolk County from a drug overdose. This year to date, there have been a total of 60 overdose deaths.

"Overdose death is the number one killer of Norfolk County residents seen by the District Attorney's Office" said Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey. "We are losing on average over one person a week to a drug overdose. We all have to step up and work together to deal with this epidemic. Norwood's Police and Fire Departments are a great example of how first responders can work together to save lives from overdose" said Morrissey.

On Monday, Norfolk District Attorney Michael W. Morrissey, Norwood Police Chief William Brooks, Fire Chief Anthony Greeley, Norwood Health Department Superintendent Sigalle Reiss and Community Coalition members of the newly formed substance abuse coalition in Norwood visited all four pharmacies located in Norwood. The purpose of the visit was to reach out to pharmacists to talk to them about this new initiative to curb overdose deaths. Pharmacists were asked to enroll in the state's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PMP) if they haven't already done so and encouraged to use the PMP before dispensing medication. The use of the PMP will ensure that medication is prescribed properly and that patients are not doctor or pharmacy shopping for prescription medication. "The information can also be used to identify individuals with significant drug abuse issues," said Morrissey.

"We visited Norwood's four pharmacies Monday. In many cases pharmacists told us they had already begun using some of the preventative strategies recommended by DA Morrissey's office. I liked what I heard" said Norwood Police Chief William Brooks, who has been instrumental in forming Norwood's new substance abuse coalition. In addition to speaking with pharmacists about the goal of this initiative, pharmacists were also provided with literature to be distributed to patients at the time of pick up about the safe storage and disposal of medicine.

Pharmacists were targeted because they are a great ally with the District Attorney's Office and Police Departments in getting the word out to their customers that 60% -70% of people get their first experience abusing pain medication from our own medicine cabinets. Chief Brooks said "a simple reminder to lock and safely secure or dispose of medication will go a long way in protecting our residents." The Norwood Police Station is open 24 hours a day and has a locked kiosk which allows residents to drop off unused or unwanted prescription medication.

Chief Brooks indicated that "as most heroin users abuse prescription opiates first, working in partnership with physicians and pharmacists is vital. The collaborative approach taken by DA Morrissey and his staff ensures that everyone is on the same page, and that information is flowing in all directions. People are not the enemy here, the scourges of drug abuse and overdose death are" said Chief Brooks. "Too many good people have died because they lapsed into addiction, and learned too late that they were losing control. There are things that that doctors, pharmacists and families can do to prevent these terrible tragedies."

Fire Chief Greeley noted that during one shift in late October Norwood Police and Fire were called to three separate overdoses. All three lives were saved after naloxone was administered.

Morrissey expects to mirror the work done on Monday in Norwood in the other 27 cities and towns in Norfolk County. He expects to visit all 120 pharmacies located in Norfolk County by the end of the year. Officials expect to partner with Canton Police Chief Ken Berkowitz next week to visit Canton pharmacies.