



NEWS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS
COURT HOUSE, NORRISTOWN, PA., BOX 311, 19404-0311

Frank X. Custer, Communications Director

Jessica Willingham, Communications Assistant

PHONE (610) 278-3061 FAX (610) 278-5943

COMMISSIONERS: JOSH SHAPIRO, *Chair*

VALERIE A. ARKOOSH, MD, MPH, *Vice Chair*

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Montco's Naloxone Program Underway and Showing Potential Life-Saving Results

Norristown, PA (April 28, 2015) – A 23-year-old man is quite possibly alive today because of Montgomery County's newly-created Naloxone (trade name: Narcan) program and the quick response of a Limerick Township police officer.

When Limerick police were called to a private residence on a recent Saturday night, they found the man unconscious with labored breathing. A neighbor told police that the man used heroin. Reacting quickly with the Naloxone the department recently had received from the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety, Officer Stephen Winneberger administered one dose of auto-injector Naloxone in the man's thigh. A short time later the man opened his eyes and began to regain consciousness. EMS personnel, who had arrived on the scene in the meantime, then transported the man to the hospital.

Naloxone is a medication used to counter the effects of opioids (heroin, for example) especially in overdose situations. It is designed to reverse the depression of the central nervous system, respiratory system, and hypotension.

In September 2014, Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners, announced the establishment of the Montgomery County Overdose Task Force to analyze the issue of increased opioid deaths and provide recommendations on how the county could help combat this epidemic. In March 2015, the task force released a 10-page preliminary report that offered a wide range of steps the county and other agencies and organizations dealing with the opioid problem should undertake.

One of the main recommendations was to ensure that local police and EMS professionals in Montgomery County "provide life-saving assistance (Naloxone) to overdose victims that is as swift and

as coordinated as possible.” The report went on to recommend that the “Montgomery County Department of Public Safety should continue to work with police, EMS, and hospital officials to ensure current protocols were as good as possible, and that additional protocols and training be put into place for police officers with departments that choose to carry and administer Naloxone.”

“When we accepted the task force’s report, we were adamant that the document they produced would not simply sit on a shelf,” Shapiro said. “Already, there have been many action items addressed, and the heroic actions of the Limerick police and our Department of Public Safety in distributing Naloxone and training the police is proof that we were serious about addressing this problem.”

The Department of Public Safety obtained a supply of 400 two pack doses of auto-injector Naloxone through the state Health Department and Kaleo Pharmaceuticals. Under the direction of regional Medical Director Dr. Ben Usatch, as well as local EMS agencies and their agency medical doctors, a program was developed to train police officers in select departments how to properly administer the drug, if needed. There is also an on-line training session for the law enforcement officers to complete.

Limerick Police Department was among the first nine departments to receive doses from the county’s supply in early April. Abington Police obtained its own supply earlier this year, and carries both the auto-injectors and the intra-nasal form of the drug.

“Police are often thought of as crime fighters; but the reality is that we are emergency first responders, who are on the street 24/7,” said Limerick Police Chief Bill Albany. “Being able to carry and administer this life saving drug to overdose victims just makes sense, because our number one mission is to protect life.”

Other police departments that have been supplied with Naloxone through the Department of Public Safety are Lower Providence, West Norriton, Whitmarsh, New Hanover, Upper Merion, West Conshohocken, Upper Providence, Norristown, and Lower Merion. Bridgeport police will receive doses in the near future, and Marlborough police have also expressed interest and information has been provided to them.

The training covers proper administration of the antidote; advice on what to do once the antidote is administered; assessing a need for a second dose; managing the airway; proper reporting of usage; proper method of storage; and, restocking as supplies are available.

Police departments in Montgomery County interested in participating in the program should contact the Department of Public Safety in Eagleville for additional information.

The Pennsylvania law that enables police, fire, and campus security to carry the antidote is known as Act 139 and was effective November 29, 2014.

Opioid-related overdoses have reached national epidemic levels and continue to climb rapidly, according to the report by the Overdose Task Force. In 2010-2011, Pennsylvania ranked 14th in the nation for prescription and heroin fatalities. Two years later, the Commonwealth ranked seventh. Montgomery County recorded 83 drug-related deaths in 2009 and 134 in 2013 – an increase of 61% in just four years. In 2009, there were 20 heroin deaths in Montgomery County. That number increased by 130% to 46 heroin deaths in 2013.



Photo Caption:

Limerick Police Chief Bill Albany collects his department's doses of Naloxone earlier this month from Ed Martin, EMS Field Specialist for the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety.