

# Post Overdose Response Team reaches out to addicts

CHILLICOTHE - After surgery, a team of health care professionals comes to a patient's room to check on them, make sure their recovery is going well and talk to family about what to expect.

Imagine if something similar happened to an overdose victim, where professionals who care about the persons' well-being come by to check on them and their recovery.

In Ross County, now it does.

Every Wednesday morning, members of the Post Overdose Response Team (PORT) meet at the Chillicothe-Ross Law Enforcement Complex. Representatives from the Heroin Partnership Project, Chillicothe Police Department, Ross County Sheriff's Office and a representative of the recovery community sift through police and sheriff's office reports.

They find the overdose calls in which Narcan, an opioid overdose reversal drug, was used to revive an overdose victim and share the information: names of those involved in the report, ages, any prior run-ins with the departments, and, most importantly, addresses.

Discussion ensues. Who is going where? Should they divide the list up? How many people on each team? What's the likelihood anyone will even be home to talk?

Those who are chosen to pound the pavement go to the addresses provided in the reports. Sometimes they go to the address where the overdose occurred, sometimes they go directly to the victim's home. No matter where

they end up, officials hope there is someone there they can help connect to services for addiction treatment and other recovery services.

Law enforcement officers and the recovery community representative knock on doors, hoping someone will answer so they can talk about the overdose, what led up to it and how to get their loved one help, or get clean themselves.

They do this every Wednesday, knocking on doors, leaving pamphlets and fliers. Some of the team members feel they have done their best to help an addict.

## **Stopping the trend**

The initiative began after two men died of a drug overdose in the same home in April. A press conference was called by law enforcement and other public officials to address the public health concern. Now the team goes out where Narcan was used in attempts to make contact with someone, anyone, and prevent further overdoses in a county that saw a record high for overdose deaths last year. They have even reached out to people in jail in attempts to connect with them.

Addicts are most at risk of overdosing when they are released from jail, according to Teri Minney, coordinator of the Heroin Partnership Program. "It's almost like immediate triage, it gives them immediate services," she said.

So far, the team members have been mostly well-received, Deputy Dave Weber of the Ross County Sheriff's Office said.

"I wasn't sure how it would be reacted to, but people sometimes want to talk and want people to hear their stories. ...People are scared, and that's why

they're talking," Pat Friel, of Friel and Associates, an addiction counseling center, said. Her organization will spend the months of June and September serving as the representative of the recovery community. Organizations, she said, trade off monthly on a rotating basis.

The PORT team has visited 61 sites, spoken with seven victims and distributed 23 packets of information since its inception, according to statistics from the Heroin Partnership Project.

"I think it's safe to say we've been pleased with the results so far and the reception that we've seen from the individuals that we've been serving," Minney said.

## The visits

Usually, PORT goes out to homes in teams of three. Minney said they tried larger groups of up to five people, but they realized the team needs to be smaller and more intimate.

PORT also studies any possible trends and where they can possibly intervene.

"The neighborhood of where (the overdose) occurred gets us a better pipeline of information," Chief Deputy T.J. Hollis of the Ross County Sheriff's Office said. "It reinforces the community concept of 'we're all in this together.' The community comes together with resources, and the greatest (resources) we have are neighbors right next door. "

Ross County officials had been looking at starting PORT for months before the dual fatal overdoses and finally found a good model in Cincinnati. The project also comes on the heels of [a successful program](#) in Lucas County, established in 2014. That program, the Drug Abuse Response Team, meets

with overdose victims, sometimes in a hospital room immediately after the overdose, and helps guide them toward recovery.

Minney said the overdose response team often brings together entities that haven't traditionally worked together, such as the recovery and law enforcement communities — a great byproduct of the team. She said the Missing Persons Task Force taught them the power of pooling their resources, and now PORT is "heavily embedded" in that task force.