



NEWS

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Overdose Task Force Presents Findings and Recommendations to Montco Commissioners

Norristown, PA (March 9, 2015) – The Montgomery County Overdose Task Force (MCOTF) today presented its report and recommendations to the Montgomery County Commissioners aimed at combatting the growing national epidemic of opioid-related overdoses that has also affected the county.

The report, which has been in the works since Montgomery County Commissioner Josh Shapiro announced the establishment of the task force in September, 2014, made more than two dozen specific short and long-term recommendations.

Opioid-related overdoses have reached national epidemic levels and continue to climb rapidly. 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.

The co-chair of the task force, Lori Schreiber, a community outreach consultant to the county's Behavioral Health Department, emphasized the report was not designed to be a scholarly treatise that sits on a shelf. "This report provides a practical, hands-on approach to the problem."

Her co-chair, Abington Police Chief William Kelly agreed. "We know full well people are dying from heroin overdoses throughout the county, and we wanted to present you with actionable recommendations that provide realistic, practical steps we can take to address this problem," he told the commissioners. He added that this was not a final report. "In fact it is preliminary, but it is an action plan that we can put into practice."

In the introduction to the report, the task force states: “We believe the following recommendations will provide for a multidisciplinary strategy that will reduce life-threatening prescription drug and heroin overdoses. These recommendations were selected to attack this issue from a variety of angles including Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Problem Evaluation & Analysis.”

The general immediate recommendations in the report are:

- Increase public awareness of life-threatening opioid addiction abuse
- Ensure that law enforcement agencies in the county provide special focus and coordination on drug-related cases involving opioid overdoses or overdose deaths
- Reduce the availability of unneeded prescription drugs in homes that can be abused
- Increase school participation in evidence-based drug and alcohol prevention/intervention services
- Ensure that municipal police officers and EMS professionals in the county provide life-saving assistance to overdose victims that is as swift and as coordinated as possible
- Improve the ease that residents can connect with all county human services, including addiction and overdose-related services
- Increase professional awareness and education of life-threatening opioid use
- Improve recovery opportunities for those currently struggling with opioid addiction
- Commissioners should continue their support of Drug Treatment Court
- Develop a method to report and collect accurate and current overdose and overdose fatality data for proper analysis and future planning

The long-term recommendations made by the task force include:

- Improve recovery opportunities for those currently struggling with opioid addiction
- Continue to encourage state and national governments and agencies to provide for laws and policies that are in line with the goals of the Montgomery County Overdose Task Force

Commissioners Josh Shapiro and Valerie Arkoosh thanked the members of the task force for their excellent work. “I said six months ago that I didn’t want a report that was going to sit on a shelf,” Shapiro said, “and you have done that. This gives us an opportunity to begin to implement this plan as quickly as possible.” Shapiro asked the task force to continue to work, and to report back in six months with a report on what is working and what isn’t.

Arkoosh, a physician, complimented the task force on “putting together a multi-disciplinary approach” to address the problem. “The focus on prevention that you have in this report is heartening, and you

have correctly put a great deal of emphasis on messaging about this problem that has to reach people where they are.”

Each of the above recommendations is accompanied by several more specific steps. The entire report of the Overdose Task Force is on the Montgomery County website at:

<http://www.montcopa.org/overdosereport>.

The MCOTF is made up of substance abuse and medical professionals, educators, law enforcement, and concerned citizens to join them in exploring programs and protocol in prevention, treatment, and recovery. Additionally, the MCOTF analyzed this issue from the perspectives of Health Care, Legislation, Law Enforcement, Public Education, Primary Education, and Recidivism Prevention.

The MCOTF was headed by Kelly and Schreiber, along with Eileen Lafferty, director of the county’s Office of Drug and Alcohol Prevention, and Kevin Steele, first assistant district attorney for Montgomery County.

Other members of the task force are:

Bill Albany, chief of the Limerick Township Police

Renee Bates, executive director, Second Alarmers Rescue Squad

Ken Dickinson, Director of Marketing, Gaudenzia, Inc. (he is also a pharmacist)

J. David Farrell, member of the Montgomery County Drug & Alcohol Citizens Advisory Council

Mike Gordon, chief adult probation officer, Montgomery County Adult Probation

Dr. Walter Hofman, Coroner of Montgomery County

Dr. Cheryl Horsey, VP for Enrollment & Student Services, Gwynedd Mercy University

Lisa Kelley, Parent Representative; director of Angels of Mercy

Kim Rubenstein, Parent Representative; executive director, Be a Part of the Conversation