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Stafford County sheriff deputies adding life-saving opiate antidote to arsenal

By KRISTIN DAVIS THE FREE LANCE-STAR Sep 9, 2016



Stafford County Sheriff's Office deputies are now outfitted with life-saving Narcan, a prescription nasal spray that fits into the front pockets of their uniforms and reverses an opiate overdose.

KRISTIN DAVIS/THE FREE LANCE-STAR

In late August, a newly minted Stafford County sheriff's deputy learned how to administer a prescription nasal spray called Narcan that, with a quick push of a button, can reverse an opioid overdose.

Days later, he pulled the medication from his uniform front pocket and saved a life.

Original Exhibit 2450

Another deputy would do the same with a second patient while on patrol Sept. 3.

Nearly 100 Stafford deputies are now outfitted with Narcan following a final training session at the county's public safety complex Friday afternoon.

While emergency medical services have carried the opioid antidote for decades, Stafford is among a growing number of law-enforcement agencies equipping its officers with a simple nasal spray that counteracts overdoses of heroine and narcotic painkillers such as Fentanyl and Oxycodone.

"It's very important to have these tools in the hands of law enforcement," said Dr. Robert Fines, an emergency room doctor and Stafford's operational medical director who spoke during Friday's training. "They are often the first at the scene for these patients."

In the case of an overdose, minutes can mean the difference between life and death, he said.

The number of deaths from opioids and heroin has exploded in recent years, outpacing even motor-vehicle fatalities in Virginia, Fines said. In the Fredericksburg region in 2015, 75 people died from opiate overdoses. Fifty-nine died in car crashes.

"We have a problem in Virginia. We have a problem in Stafford. We have a problem in the United States," said Stafford County Fire and Rescue Deputy Chief Lori Knowles, who led Friday's session for about 30 deputies and recruits.

A change in state law a year ago that exempts from liability those rendering medical care except in instances of gross negligence has helped facilitate the rise in the number of law-enforcement officers carrying Narcan, Knowles said. So has a recent decision by the state Board of Pharmacy allowing police agencies to get the medication without a prescription.

It was only earlier this year that the nasal spray came on the market following approval by the FDA in the fall of 2015. Prior to that, the antidote had to be administered with a pre-loaded syringe.

Stafford deputies carry the palm-sized prescription nasal spray in their uniform pockets. A single dose costs less than \$40—“a pretty good price to pay to save someone’s life,” Fines said.

“You’re going to give them Narcan if you suspect an opioid overdose,” Knowles said during the training session. That’s because the drug is so safe that even if a patient hasn’t experienced an overdose, the medication is unlikely to cause side effects.

Knowles went through the signs of an opioid overdose: Loud snoring; gurgling; limp limbs; being unresponsive; pale, gray, clammy skin; slow pulse; shallow breathing; and unconsciousness. She ticked off the three quick steps of administering Narcan nasal spray: open the package, put the plunger into the patient’s nostril and push.

If it is in fact an overdose that has occurred, Narcan should work within three to five minutes, she said.

“If you have a patient who’s unconscious, you’re not going to hurt them and you could save their life,” Fines said.

In Stafford, that’s already happened twice.

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Want to go?

An event at the Fredericksburg Fairgrounds from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. today will feature nearly 30 vendors offering information on services for those struggling with addiction.

“Knockout Addiction: Together We Can Rope the Dope” will also include a Narcan training session for up to 20 people at 12:30 p.m. Narcan is a nasal spray that can reverse the effects of an opioid overdose.

Sheila Raye Charles (daughter of Ray Charles) will deliver a message about her own 12-year battle with addiction. She’ll also minister at Church of the Rock at 501 Cambridge St. in South Stafford Sunday at 10:30 a.m.

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