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TOP STORIES

STEPPING UP FIGHT

Towns are encouraging employees to learn how to give opioid antidote

BY CHRISTINE CHUNG
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As Long Island's opioid crisis persists, municipalities are boosting preventive measures and have increasingly turned to training all staff in how to administer Narcan, a drug used to reverse an overdose.

All towns on Long Island have been training key employees such as emergency medical technicians and public safety officers in the use of Narcan. Now Nassau's three towns — Hempstead, North Hempstead and Oyster Bay — are offering free voluntary training to all town employees.

Town officials said they are responding to a community need and that with many of their employees interacting with the public, it made sense to educate a broader group on how to use the opioid antidote.

"We're so aware that Long Island and in fact the nation is in the grips of opioid crisis," said North Hempstead Town Supervisor Judi Bosworth. "Just like employees are offered training in CPR, why not training in the use of Narcan, which can save a life?"

Narcan, also called naloxone, can be administered by injections or nasal spray. It blocks the effects of drugs such as fentanyl, opium and heroin by attaching to the same parts of the brain that receive opioids.

North Hempstead held its first training with 75 town employees on Friday, in partnership with Northwell Health. Dr. Sandeep Kapoor, assistant professor of medicine at Hofstra Medical School who was one of the training presenters, told the town staff they were "the frontline folks in our community" for helping address opioid addiction, an issue found "everywhere."

Newsday has reported that

as many as 600 Long Islanders died last year from opioid overdoses, according to estimates from county medical examiners. Nationwide, opioids killed more than 42,000 people in 2016, which was more than any year on record, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported. Deaths nationally have increased by 88 percent per year from 2013 to 2016, the agency reported. The White House last week convened an opioid "summit" to discuss ways to address the problem nationally.

Hempstead Town Councilman Anthony D'Esposito, who runs community Narcan trainings, said the town trainings would build on a network of first responders who know how to handle an overdose.

"It doesn't always have to be your loved one. It could be a complete stranger" who has an overdose, D'Esposito said. "They could be on a bus, at a movie theater, at work, on the beach. If you have those resources and you're able to save a life, why not take a half-hour out of your night and learn how to do it?"

Oyster Bay Town officials have also offered voluntary training sessions to employees and more than 50 have participated since last year, not including public safety officers and bay constables who were trained last summer, officials said.

At North Hempstead's nearly two-hour training for 75 town employees on Friday, three Northwell representatives discussed addiction, treatment options, types of opioids, and how to identify an overdose and properly administer naloxone. At the end of the session, a long line of participants collected the blue Narcan kits, which are stocked with two doses of 4-milligram naloxone nasal sprays, a face mask, gloves and

WHO GETS NARCAN TRAINING

NASSAU

Hempstead: Trains first responders, bay constables and park workers. Holds regular community trainings and town trainings for interested staff.

North Hempstead: Held its first training for any interested staff with plans to possibly hold more for additional employees.

Oyster Bay: Holds community trainings and town trainings for interested staff. Trains public safety officers and bay constables.

SUFFOLK

Babylon: Trains police officers, firefighters, EMTs and Beacon Family Wellness treatment center employees.

Brookhaven: Trains lifeguards, fire marshals, bay constables, some public safety officers.

East Hampton: Trains all first responders, including town police officers and marine patrol.

Huntington: Trains harbor masters, bay constables.

Islip: Trains park rangers, fire marshals.

Riverhead: Trains police officers.

Shelter Island: Trains police officers, EMTs.

Smithtown: Trains public safety officers.

Southampton: Trains town police officers, EMTs.

Southold: Trains town police officers.

instructions.

The Nassau towns are obtaining Narcan kits for free through the New York State Opioid Overdose Prevention Program, which provides registered nonprofits and other organizations such as hospitals with naloxone.

No Suffolk towns offer wide Narcan training for employees, but several town officials said they would consider expanding Narcan trainings to employees.

Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman said that in addition to the efforts of the town's dedicated opioid task force, training town employees could be the next step



Narcan kits were given to town

of outreach.

Shelter Island Supervisor Gary Gerth said some town staff have independently opted to get trained and that the town would embrace the opportunity to get wide Narcan training. "It's certainly worthwhile," Gerth said. "In all likelihood, most people will never have to use it, but if you do it'll be critical."

Brookhaven Town spokesman Jack Krieger said that town trains employees such as lifeguards and bay constables but would expand the training for any employees who

AGAINST DRUG DEATHS



employees at North Hempstead's first Narcan training class Friday. ■ Video: [newsday.com/nassau](https://www.newsday.com/nassau)

expressed interest.

"Anyone can get the training," Krieger added. "It's not mandatory for everyone."

Some park rangers and fire marshals in Islip Town have taken Narcan courses and signed up for refresher training, town spokeswoman Caroline Smith said. The training isn't mandated by any code or official regulation, but Smith said the town had found Narcan training to be a "good practice" if staff are "confronted with the unfortunate situation necessitating its use."

Drug treatment advocates

say municipality trainings are an important step to keeping more vulnerable people alive.

Without Narcan, Long Island's 600 fatal overdoses would likely have been "exponentially higher," said Jeffrey Reynolds, president and CEO of the Mineola-based Family and Children's Association, a nonprofit that provides counseling, outpatient drug rehab treatment and other services for disadvantaged individuals.

"Five years ago, nobody had ever heard of naloxone. It was something EMS carried," Reynolds said. "Most employ-

ers are coming to understand this is impacting the workforce across Long Island."

Eight years ago, the Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence became the first agency to begin offering Narcan training on Long Island, executive director Steve Chassman said. Since then, the group has trained more than 12,000 people, he said.

"We can't stock naloxone any faster than we could schedule trainings," he said. "It's a lifesaving serum. This isn't like a fad. The truth is you hope to never use it."

Health chief's Medicaid offer

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's top health official is pushing forward with a key recommendation for helping states combat the opioid epidemic.

At a White House summit on opioids last week, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said he is willing to exempt more state Medicaid programs from a long-standing restriction that limits where those struggling with addiction may get treatment — all states have to do is ask.

"We're open for business," Azar said in the East Room of the White House, where top Trump administration officials laid out strategies for combating the national plague of drug abuse and overdose.

In October, the president declared opioid addiction a public health emergency, and asked for an additional \$13 million to expand addiction treatment when he unveiled his 2019 budget in mid-February. Also last week, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced a new opioids task force.

Azar said he told state governors at their winter meeting two weekends ago that he is prioritizing Medicaid "waivers," making it easier for states to provide substance abuse treatment.

There are several levers these waivers can pull to expand treatment, but a chief way is through removing what's known as the "IMD exclusion" — a federal law banning medical centers and hospitals with more than 16 beds from providing substance abuse treatment.

Treatment advocates, governors and medical

providers have lobbied to remove this exclusion, which has been in place since the Medicaid program was created a half-century ago. Back then, there was a big push to deinstitutionalize mental-health patients in favor of integrating them into communities.

In August, Trump's opioid commission identified removing the IMD exclusion as the top way to make treatment available to patients immediately. "This is the single fastest way to increase treatment availability across the nation," the report said.

Azar can't reverse the policy because it is law, but he can excuse states from it. He said HHS has granted five states such waivers — including West Virginia and Kentucky, two states with high rates of addiction — and he wants more to apply.

"I berated the governors, saying, 'Why have we gotten only five of these [waiver requests] so far?'" Azar joked Thursday.

Azar said he even encouraged governors who are seeking multiple changes to Medicaid to make a separate request for an IMD exclusion waiver, which would allow the agency to expedite it and start expanding access to treatment sooner.

"I'm hoping we'll see a faster clip," Azar said. "We can handle those quite quickly."

Several times in the past few weeks, Azar has emphasized viewing those addicted to opioids not as morally corrupt but as in need of medical help.

"We need to treat addiction as a medical challenge, not as moral failing," Azar said.

NEWSDAY / J. CONRAD WILLIAMS JR.