

## EDITORIAL

# Help addicts, but get answers, too

New opioid program should follow up

As deaths stemming from opioid addiction on Long Island have reached unprecedented levels, law enforcement officials and health professionals have tried practically everything they can think of to stem the epidemic.

About 600 people died from drug overdoses on Long Island last year, not because society isn't reacting, but because the problem is so intractable. Once hooked, addicts find that quitting heroin and prescription painkillers is terribly difficult with treatment, and practically impossible without it. And the criminal justice system is ill-equipped to deal with people whose nonviolent, low-level misdeeds, such as drug possession and petty theft, are criminal but whose primary victims are usually themselves, and whose deepest offense is often breaking the hearts of loved ones.

Now Suffolk County has rolled out one more program to try to make a difference. Nonviolent drug offenders with little or no criminal record are being offered addiction treatment that, if they participate for 90 days, would erase pending criminal charges. The program doesn't replace Suffolk's Drug Treatment Court, where offenders must enter a guilty plea before they can enter treatment, and must participate for 12 or 18 months.

Defense attorneys say Drug Treatment Court remains the right option for some addicts who stand accused; however, another choice is needed because many defendants won't plead guilty, commit to lengthy programs or wait for the legal process to play out just to get to treatment. That's particularly true when the jail sentences they would receive for a guilty plea are shorter than the rehabilitation time they'd have to commit to. And if they fail to successfully complete the diversion program, they are right back to facing those sentences.

Suffolk's new program is called Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Education, or CARE. It is modeled on a similar initiative

the Bronx district attorney's office launched late last year. Nassau County also offers a variety of interventions that can lead to treatment rather than incarceration for addiction-related crimes.

All these efforts are worthy, but one of their most important goals at this point ought to be to compile data and detailed follow-up of participants to help show what works to keep people sober.

Is it intervention that erases charges and prevents convictions, or intervention that follows a guilty plea or conviction, when the punishment can be stayed and the record erased if treatment is completed? Does a 90-day commitment to a program work, or are 12 or 18 months needed? Which of the state-certified facilities has succeeded in getting people sober, keeping them sober and why? Is medically assisted treatment the answer, or 12-step programs, or a combination of the two? Does methadone work better than suboxone or Vivitrol? Do clients do better when they pick the type of treatment that resonates with them, or is that choosing irrelevant or even counterproductive?

Criminal justice and addiction treatment cost a lot of money, and addiction destroys a lot of lives. It's good to create more options, but we need to find out what works, too, so we can go from trying everything to doing the right thing.

— *The editorial board*



DANIEL GOODRICH

**Suffolk officials announce the CARE treatment program in August.**

## MATT DAVIES



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## LETTERS

### Socialist views led to popular programs

A letter writer criticized congressional candidate Liuba Grechen Shirley for expressing what he regards as a socialist ideology ["Don't fall for false socialist ideas," Sept. 20]. What, are we resorting to McCarthyism now?

A democratic socialist view has been responsible for Social Security, Medicare, and union worker supports, including pay parity and health insurance. Where would most of us be without these programs?

Grechen Shirley seeks to preserve women's rights, family leave and free education. Educating those who would otherwise remain unemployable and unable to provide for their families is less costly than paying for an uneducated and unemployable populace. Educated and skilled citizens provide a

strong workforce that attracts industry.

*Terry Brown,  
Bay Shore*

Letter writers raised objections to the rise in calls for a socialist economic system to deal with high health care costs and college tuition. Their objections mainly centered on the rise in taxes that would be needed.

The top 5 percent in our society are doing just fine. Their wages have risen. They're enjoying the benefits of the tax cuts. They can afford good health care and college tuition. The rest of the population is struggling. Wages have stagnated for decades. The tax cuts have had little impact on their disposable income. Minimum health insurance is unattainable for many, and college tuition leaves their children with large debts.

Meanwhile, the pharma-

ceutical and health insurance companies earn huge profits even after spending billions of dollars on marketing and advertising. If we take these costs and profits out of the system by adopting a single-payer approach and use the savings to improve health care, that would be a benefit to everyone. Similarly, if more young people were able to go to college without incurring huge debt, they would earn more and over a lifetime and pay more taxes on those earnings, benefiting everyone.

Don't be put off by the term socialism. What we need are smarter approaches to help fix our fiscal problems.

*Carl Borruso,  
Valley Stream*

A reader accused Liuba Grechen Shirley of expressing a socialist ideology. But what sort of corporate socialism are they advocating if we