

Recovery Center dispels myths, distributes Narcan

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RECOVERY CENTER'S MISSION — Lakes Region Recovery Center volunteer Marissa Smith (on left) and Executive Director Tracey Martin hold the products that are used to reverse an opioid overdose. (De Busk Photo)

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Most people wouldn't think twice about having a fire extinguisher in their home or a personal floatation devise on their boat.

However, many people are extremely hesitant to have in their possession Narcan, the medicine that first responders use to save the life of someone who has overdosed from opioids.

Narcan or naloxone comes in a nasal spray and in an injectable form and can help someone whose breathing has stopped, according to the Executive Director of Lakes Region Recovery Center Tracey Martin.

"We use the word Narcan because people are more familiar with it," she said, adding that naloxone is the generic name of the medicine and Narcan is the brand. "It is a medicine that rapidly reverses the effects of an opioid

overdose. It is called an opioid antagonist. It simply means that it attaches to the opioid receptors and it reverses and blocks the effects of opioids. It can quickly restore someone's breathing. It is a life-saving tool. It is like having a fire extinguisher. You don't expect to have a fire but if there is fire in your home, you are glad that you had the fire extinguisher."

There are a lot of misconceptions surrounding naloxone.

Lakes Region Recovery Center (LRRC), the non-profit located behind the Bridgton Hospital, has a mission of dispelling the myths about naloxone and getting Narcan into the hands of the general public.

In fact, once a month, the center will hold an open house and people can learn how to administer Narcan. The first one took place on Monday.

Recently, the center held a community-education event at Food City in Bridgton. The staff set up a table with brochures and samples. The idea was to let the public know what Narcan is and how to use it on somebody who has overdosed.

"Going out into the community and doing these events — people didn't know what this was. They had no idea what we were giving out, what we were training people on, what it was for," Martin said.

Some people thought that the Narcan was actually methadone, the drug used to help get addicts off heroin or other opiates.

Nobody can get high or buzzed from Narcan, Martin said.

Other people said they would like to have Narcan handy, but they were afraid they would end up harming rather than helping someone.

"Someone who doesn't have opiates in the system, it will not affect them. People say, 'What if the person is not overdosing on heroin?' It has no effect on someone who doesn't have opiates in their system," Martin said. "Another common response of people is, 'I don't know anyone who uses heroin.'"

There is a long list of opioid-based medicines: Hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone, morphine, codeine, Tramadol and Fentanyl.

"These are all prescribed by a doctor. When someone uses more than the recommended dose or starts mixing them, they put themselves at risk of overdosing," Martin said.

Narcan: Solution for community problem

LRRC Communications Specialist Candy Greenberg said the addiction problem is widespread and impacts people who don't use.

"It is a community problem. It is not just kids [young people]. It's brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles," Greenberg said. "What we would like to see is that people carry Narcan. Maybe your neighbor overdoses. Maybe, your neighbor's son or daughter overdoses. Our first choice is that no one in the world would be addicted to opioids. But that is not a reality. Our preference is that people have a way to reverse an opioid overdose. Our hope is that we could put this into the hands of the public."

The staff and volunteers at the center welcome people who are concerned citizens, community members who have a family member who is using opiates, and people who are addicted to opiates but are not yet ready to quit.

"We aren't saying it is okay to use heroin or to abuse any other opioid but until they are ready to quit we want to make sure they have a life-saving tool," Martin said. "We cannot push anyone. It is their own journey. It is their own recovery road. When you are in the vicious cycle of using, you are in a dark hole. You cannot see the light. They may not have any support system in their life. Maybe bridges have been burnt and they are too afraid to talk to family. There is life after using. We can recover."

With Covid-19 causing fears of uncertainty, fears of falling ill and dying, and the isolation from months quarantine has resulted in an increase in the use of both alcohol and illegal drugs.

"I am not going to be shocked to see that there is an increase in overdoses by December 2020. I did some research, and the Maine Attorney General's office put preliminary estimates for the third quarter at 255 overdoses. I don't know what it is going to be by December and it is so scary," Martin said. "People are struggling They don't have to struggle alone. People need to know that LRRC is open. We are providing services for people when they are ready."

Residents are reaching out and getting Narcan from the center because the fear of losing someone they know and love is too great.

"I've had people pop in and say that they have had overdoses at their home and they really need this so they can make sure those people do not end up dying. They say they have lost enough friends. They have lost too many people to this," Martin said.

In the nicer weather, the LRRC staff was able to get out into the community. Starting Oct. 19, once a month, they will be doing Narcan distribution events at the center.

The center is located at the far back of the Bridgton Hospital Campus. There are United Ambulance vehicles parked in the lot. The phone number is 803-8707.

A person, who needs or wants to have Narcan on hand, can enter the center. The staff will train them how to use it.

"We do a quick training on how to use it. You call 9-1-1. You do rescue breathing. You do the Naloxone. We show them how. We give them a pamphlet," Martin said. "Most of the time, people are familiar with the nasal spray because it is like nose-spray. Believe it or not, they are more nervous about the injectables. They have never seen anyone give themselves a diabetes shot. Some people are afraid of needles. People are scared. People are afraid that maybe they will administer it wrong. Again, it is no different from having another life-saving measure."