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Press Release – NALOXONE

Generally, when we think of victims, we think of someone who was directly impacted by a crime. Someone who was physically assaulted, had something stolen from them, was threatened, or put in danger. Citizens become officially referred to as victims when a crime is reported. And for those whose career is in law enforcement, whether as police or prosecutors, the primary motivator every day is the opportunity to help victims.

But we also serve our greater communities generally, and not everyone who suffers from crime is technically a victim. For example, at this point, many in our county have dealt with an addict family member, or know someone who has. Indeed, one in four families across this country is impacted. Those families dealing with an addict are also suffering, whether they have the official moniker of “victim” or not. And make no mistake, many have in fact been victimized but decided not to report the crime. The addict’s behavior is often all-consuming for the family and their other extended family members and friends, and their unpredictable and risky behavior adds an incredible amount of heartache and worry and stress to all within that circle. Law enforcement cares about them as well, and certainly shares most everyone’s frustration with the endless cycle of the disease of addiction and its symptom of criminal behavior.

Not to be overlooked is the user, or addict. While not all addicts commit crimes, some do. In fact, one addicted offender may commit 2-3 crimes per day, 3-4 days per week. Such an individual is difficult for many of us to go so far as to classify as a “victim” of addiction as well, but our society better understands this disease today than it did years ago. Now, many of us know that opiate addiction is less about feeling “good” or “high” than it is about the desperation of not wanting to feel awful or physically ill. These days, addicts and users are dying at record rates across the country, leaving an unfortunate legacy of unrealized potential and leaving their families to suffer yet more heartache.

Re: NALOXONE
February 1, 2016

Today, I'm happy to announce that Franklin County law enforcement officers will all be issued Naloxone to carry while they are on duty. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, "Naloxone is a medication that can reverse an overdose that is caused by an opioid drug (i.e. prescription pain medication or heroin). When administered during an overdose, naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing within two to eight minutes. Naloxone has been used safely by medical professionals for more than 40 years and has only one function: to reverse the effects of opioids on the brain and respiratory system in order to prevent death." As law enforcement officers are often "first responders" to overdose events, there is a real chance that lives can be saved. In other counties in Pennsylvania, they already have. In 2015, police officers carrying Naloxone in just a handful of counties were able to reverse 453 overdoses.

Law enforcement cares. No one has the market cornered on compassion, and law enforcement cares as much, if not more, than anybody. Police officers take an oath to protect and serve, and they know that each day could be their last. They would lay down their lives for their fellow citizens, and there is no greater love than that. We in law enforcement recognize that every single life is precious and a gift, and that we must do all we can to help victims who are suffering. The addicts who have fallen prey to the disease of addiction are our sons, daughters, husbands, wives, parents, and friends. They matter. This is not about "us" and "them." In this great country and in this community, it must always be viewed as "us." While much must be done in order to combat addiction and the scourge illegal drugs bring to our front doors, this effort moves us closer to recognizing the grayness of the line between addiction and crime.

I thank the Pennsylvania District Attorney's Association, the Pennsylvania Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs, Summit Health and Capital Blue Cross for assisting me and my fellow law enforcement officers in obtaining access to this important substance that is known to save lives. Thanks in part to this team of professionals, every law enforcement officer in Franklin County will be carrying a packet of Naloxone on his/her person, and will be trained to administer it to victims of addiction.

