



Why the Berea Police Department Officers Carry Narcan

The reason that the Berea Police Department recently instituted a policy enabling our officers to carry Narcan is simple.

It saves lives.

Everyone has probably read something in the past year about the growing public health crisis in the United States caused by heroin overdoses. The stories you read are true, and Ohio is considered to be at the center of the crisis.

While statistics from 2016 are still being compiled, Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Gilson estimates that in 2016 there were approximately 660 deaths due to heroin or fentanyl overdoses. In 2017, he expects the numbers to increase to at least 775 deaths.

Believe it or not, nationwide, drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death among Americans under age 50.

Most experts agree that the overwhelming majority of opioid overdoses are accidental. People don't take the drug planning to overdose or die. Opioid addictions cross all racial, gender, education and income boundaries. You probably know someone with an addiction to opioids. Sadly, Berea's police and firefighters respond to far too many drug overdoses. However, the lives of many Berea residents have been saved due to our ability to administer Narcan.

What is Narcan? Basically, it is an antidote to opioids. When someone overdoses, their breathing slows down and may eventually stop, leading to death. Narcan blocks the effects of opioids and reverses the symptoms.

The decision to carry Narcan may also save the life of a law enforcement officer. You may have seen stories in the media about law enforcement officers overdosing as a result of coming into contact with heroin or fentanyl during the attempt to save the life of the addict. In some of those cases, Narcan was used to save the life of the police officer. Earlier this year, a Berea Police Officer came into contact with a powdery substance and soon showed signs of impairment. Although he did not actually overdose, we would have had the ability to immediately save his life, if necessary.

Firefighters/Paramedics have long carried Narcan, along with other life-saving drugs. However, by law, police officers were prohibited from administering these drugs. Due to a change in Ohio law, police officers are now permitted to carry and administer Narcan. In fact, even Ohio residents can obtain Narcan at some pharmacies to have doses available if a loved one overdoses. While Narcan can be administered by injection, Berea Police Officers use the nasal spray version of the drug.

Medical personnel from Southwest General Health Center trained each of our officers so they know how to identify the signs of an opioid overdose and how to administer the Narcan.

In Berea, we are fortunate to have our police and fire stations located in areas where they can arrive at any place in Berea within minutes of receiving a 9-1-1 call. Sometimes minutes are the difference between life and death. Therefore, our policy allows the first person on the scene to administer the antidote.

Some people may question why law enforcement agencies carry Narcan, but not other life-saving drugs.

It's simple. Ohio law prohibits non-medically trained and supervised individuals from administering most drugs. The administration of Narcan is simple. There are not any known medical risks to administering Narcan. So, there is not any health risk if administered in error or in dosages exceeding recommendations. That is not the case with most other life-saving drugs. Other life-saving drugs require an assessment by medically trained personnel to determine whether use of the drug is appropriate and in what dosage.

Others may wonder why law enforcement officers are taking extraordinary measures to save the lives of those breaking the law, since taking drugs is a crime - especially when they may have to repeatedly respond to the same person overdosing.

Again, it's simple. Berea Police Officers, are here to serve all residents. Opioid addiction is a public health problem. Our first duty is to protect the public—and sometimes that means protecting someone from themselves. True community engagement means working with community partners to address and prevent problems.

The City has a three-pronged plan to address the opioid problem. First and foremost, we will take all reasonable measures to save lives. Second, we will work with addicts and their families to assist with obtaining treatment through our Safe Passages Program. Our officers and volunteers work with numerous health care and treatment facilities to streamline the process. Once in treatment, we also follow-up to support the addict's efforts to maintain sobriety. And, third, we will aggressively pursue and prosecute suppliers of the killer drugs.

The City is proud to announce that on September 5, 2017, it received a \$100,000 grant to be used in partnership with Olmsted Township, the City of Bedford and Newburgh Heights to implement Quick Response Teams. Teams consisting of a police officer, paramedic and social worker intervene quickly in response to overdoses involving Berea residents and will encourage and help facilitate treatment.

The policy of the Berea Police Department to carry and administer Narcan is an essential tool in our core mission of serving and protecting the public.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like information about how you or someone you live can help, please contact Police Chief Joe Grecol at (440) 826-5852 or the Berea Police Community Engagement Unit at (440) 274-5009.

