

“Unmask Addiction” Campaign Launched to Battle Overdose Deaths

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By Kristen M. Leccese



For several years now, the rate of **heroin use in the US has been on a steady rise**. According to the **CDC**, the number of heroin-related deaths has nearly *quadrupled* since 2000, rising from 0.7 deaths per 100,000 Americans in 2000 to 2.7 deaths per 100,000 in 2013. Most of this increase happened in recent years – between 2010 and 2013, the US experienced an alarming **37% rise** in heroin-related deaths.

The number of people who die from drug abuse is now higher than the number of people killed in traffic accidents. In fact, the issue of heroin use in the US has reached a level severe enough to be considered a “public health epidemic” by government officials.

Clearly, traditional methods to deter drug use have failed when it comes to heroin. This issue is incredibly complex, stemming from the extreme abuse of prescription opiates throughout the last decade. When the restrictions on prescription drugs were tightened, many addicts turned to heroin instead. This highly addictive street drug produces a high that’s nearly identical to prescription opiates.

New, stricter laws on prescription drugs were intended to curb opiate abuse – instead, they produced a disturbing and unforeseen side effect. When the government put these laws into place, they overlooked a major factor: **addiction does not simply disappear because of the law**. Millions of Americans who were previously using drugs like OxyContin are now suffering the devastating impact of heroin addiction.



Now, many organizations are scrambling to find an effective method to battle this terrible problem. Many experts believe that prevention methods must aim to accurately portray the harsh reality of heroin abuse in 2015: **this drug is not limited to low-income areas, homeless shelters, or dangerous street corners. Heroin abuse is happening in affluent neighborhoods, quiet suburbs, and at top-tier universities. Heroin addiction can happen to anyone.**

Following this premise, Somerset County in New Jersey launched a new campaign yesterday called “Unmask Addiction.” The name of the campaign was chosen to encourage people to stop thinking of heroin as a drug abused only by people on the streets in low-income areas.

“We realized that the addicts were people who we saw every day — mothers and grandmothers and athletes and students,” said Robbie Tarpley Raffish, co-creator of the campaign. “People who were wearing a mask and who were then behind the mask an addict, and that really informed how we decided to create a campaign to get people to think about where that addiction might be.”

The Unmask Addiction campaign will face this problem head on. It will provide resources on treatment options, distribute take-back boxes to dispose of unused and expired prescription medications, and offer training programs for responding to narcotic drug overdoses.

The overall goal of Unmask Addiction is to remove the stigma and get help for those who need it. “We’re hoping that we’ll be able to address some of the stigma that surrounds addiction,” said Matey Barker, behavioral health director with the Somerset County Health Department. “We know that many people don’t seek treatment out of fear of what the repercussions will be, that people will judge them.”

Source: <http://www.delmarvanow.com/story/news/local/maryland/2015/03/25/unmask-addiction-somerset-drug-addiction/70459224/>

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