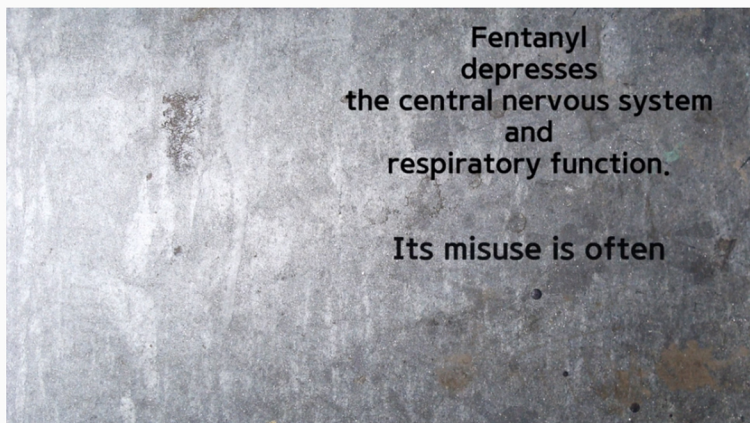


Opioid task force fights barriers to treatment



A batch of heroin that contained fentanyl killed around 13 people in Monroe County and the region in May 2015, the deadliest month for heroin/fentanyl overdoses last year. (June 7, 2016) Video by Sarah Taddeo

Gary Craig, @gcraig1 7:25 p.m. EDT July 23, 2016



(Photo: File photo)

With [overdose deaths mounting](#) and new strands of opioids arriving in the Rochester region, local treatment providers, insurance representatives, police and families who have lost loved ones have formed a task force to try to route more addicts to successful treatment.

Organized by the Rochester area's National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence, the Monroe County Opioid Task Force is trying to loosen insurance and other barriers to treatment, and to ensure that addicts in need of help do not run into blockades. The task force also hopes to bolster education to prevent addiction before it starts.

"The opioid crisis is really complex," said Jennifer Faringer, the council's Rochester region director. "It's not simply about law enforcement."

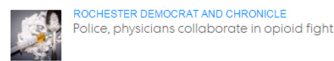
First formed in March, the task force meetings typically have 50 or more people, addressing topics ranging from correctional facility care for addicts to different treatment models, such as [ROcovery Fitness](#), which uses physical activity to encourage sobriety.

► DATABASE: Opioid deaths by county

A meeting Friday was a combination of success stories and warnings that even deadlier drugs may be on the horizon. Some speakers highlighted state and federal legislation that is increasing treatment options, while others cautioned that there are still difficulties providing help for those who have completed detoxification, but have not shaken the cravings.

The Rochester region, like much of the northeast and other parts of the country, is in the midst of a growing heroin and opioid epidemic, [with overdose deaths increasing](#). Meanwhile, chemists at the Monroe County Crime Laboratory who analyze crime scene evidence, say they are seeing opioids far more powerful than heroin.

For the past year, the lab has seen [growing caseloads involving fentanyl](#), a synthetic drug 50 to 100 times more powerful than heroin. Now, the presence of a potent opioid known as furanyl fentanyl — often manufactured in China — is also showing up mixed with other drugs. The Medical Examiner's Office has also seen overdose deaths from furanyl fentanyl.



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The drugs even present dangers for police. Some of the opioids are dangerous to the touch when in pure form, the crime laboratory's forensics supervisor, Jim Wesley, said at Friday's task force meeting.

One drug that has appeared in Ohio is used as an elephant tranquilizer and another, W18, is far more potent than fentanyl.

"There are these crazy crazy new drugs," Wesley said.

The task force meets bi-monthly, but now also has subcommittees meeting monthly, focusing on issues ranging from insurance access to police response to the crisis.

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To create the task force, the local National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Dependence reached out to the [Family Recovery Network](#), a group of families and friends of addicts who work with others in similar straits. Some members of the network lost relatives to addiction.

"We've all been in our silos working on the exact same problem, but from different angles," said Janice Holmes, the Recovery Network's founder and president.

Holmes, whose 22-year-old son is now in treatment for addiction, said for families of addicts the issue can often be emotionally fraught. But the task force, she said, relies on solid information about what the community is facing with heroin and opioids.

"It's fact-based, data-driven and results-oriented," she said.

"We spend a lot of time on barriers but we also feel if anyone can unearth solutions, it's going to be the people in that room."

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