

Narcan project has stopped nine opioid overdoses; seeks additional naloxone kits

23 September 2016, by Bob Shepard



Credit: University of Alabama at Birmingham

A University of Alabama at Birmingham crowd-funded study to provide naloxone kits to family and friends of at-risk opioid users has distributed over 100 kits and has seen nine overdose reversals since it began in Nov. 2015. Naloxone, known as Narcan, is an injectable medication that can reverse opioid overdose. Typically provided at emergency departments or by first responders, the UAB project was the first in Alabama to place naloxone kits in the hands of those close to opioid abusers.

"We identified and trained non-medical friends and family of those at-risk to distinguish signs of overdose and administer this life-saving drug," said Karen Cropsey, Psy. D., associate professor in the UAB Department of Psychiatry. "We raised \$11,500 through Crowdfunding at UAB which allowed us to reach our original goal of purchasing 200 kits and will allow us to expand the program to 350 kits."

Cropsey says eight of the nine reversals were third

party situations, where the trained responders stopped an overdose in someone other than the family member or friend for whom they originally received the prescription for naloxone.

"That's nine lives saved, and nine people who hopefully can go on to receive medical treatment for their substance abuse and addiction issues," Cropsey said. "It's not every day that we do a study that directly saves someone's life. We do studies on smoking that we hope will someday prevent or delay cancer or lung disease, but here we have an intervention that can be truly life-saving."

Cropsey says national statistics indicate that implementing naloxone distribution programs led to a 43 percent drop in opioid overdose deaths. In the United States, 63 people die each day from [opioid overdose](#), which includes heroin and prescription pain medications such as OxyContin, Lortab and Percocet. The Southeast is experiencing the greatest increase in opioid use and Alabama has the highest rate of opioid prescriptions. Birmingham and the surrounding counties reported 12 heroin deaths in 2010. By 2014, this number increased to 137.

"We're thrilled that we were able to raise enough money to purchase additional naloxone kits through the crowdfunding project," Cropsey said. "More money means more kits and more lives saved. The key now is to understand how best to conduct recruitment and training. We need to have the right people trained so that the kits are in the hands of appropriate people in the community."

Cropsey and her team continue to recruit interested individuals to receive a naloxone kit.

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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