



Town of Darien

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Stopping the Cycle of Addiction: The Important Role of Drug Drop off Boxes in Prevention

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The most recent health-related epidemic is not the typical viral or bacterial infection: addiction and related overdose deaths are now taking over 50,000 US lives per year, a statistic that is only increasing. The deathly condition starts with something that is likely given to all of us to *improve* our health: prescription medication.

According to the Journal the American Medical Association (JAMA), almost half of Americans use at least one prescription drug, with more than 10% taking five or more. The danger of this development lies in the prescription of strong pain medications: “We ended up, a few years ago, with approximately nine (9) billion individual pills- oxycodone and hydrocodone derivatives and other strong opioids- being prescribed in this country annually. That is equivalent to 30 strong opioid pills for every man, woman, and child in our country”, said Bertha Madras of Harvard Medical School. These 9 billion pills contributed to 40 US deaths every day caused by prescription painkillers, and opioids becoming the #1 cause of overdose deaths.

The dangers of prescription painkiller abuse are also contributing to a new generation of heroin addicts. Heroin is chemically similar to these pills because they are both derivatives of the opium poppy, and can become a cheap alternative to those addicted to the opiates found in the prescription medication. Because of this, four of five new heroin users get their start on prescription painkillers. Our youngest generation is increasingly susceptible to falling into this cycle, as many see prescription drugs as a “safe” alternative to other drugs such as cocaine. 1 in 4 teens have abused a prescription drug in their lifetime, and two thirds of them get these pills for free from friends or family’s medicine cabinets. This cycle has proved increasingly powerful, with a 157% increase in overdose deaths in Connecticut alone from 2012 to 2016.

While prescription painkillers are the primary lead in to heroin abuse, benzodiazepines (prescribed for anxiety disorders) and stimulants (prescribed for ADHD and related conditions) are gateways to prescription pain pills and then heroin. Teens that abuse these kinds of drugs are 5X more likely to then abuse pain medication.

Connecticut legislation has taken crucial steps to battle this epidemic including monitoring programs, Good Samaritan laws, increasing access to opioid antagonists that reverse the effects of an overdose, and limits on certain opioid prescriptions.

What YOU can do: Preventative action is key in stopping the cycle of opioid addiction. Take steps to monitor the number of pills prescribed to individuals in your household and keep them in a secure place. One of the most important preventative actions Darien residents can take is to utilize the drug drop-box located in the lobby of the Darien Police Station. This box is a place for anyone to safely dispose of

unwanted or expired prescription medications, available 24/7. By guarding prescription medications and *safely* disposing unnecessary pills, everyone plays a key part in keeping themselves, their loved ones, and the Darien community a safer and healthier place.

For more information please visit the health department website www.darienhealth.com. Follow us on Twitter www.twitter.com/darienhealth to keep up with our campaign to raise awareness of the dangers of prescription drugs and promote use of our local drop off box.



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