

## Overdose Surge Has City Reeling - Officials Confer on Epidemic

TAUNTON — In the last month and a half, 64 people have overdosed in Taunton, five fatally, and at a community meeting, Police Chief Edward Walsh asked a question that no one can yet answer. “When will this end?”

Bristol District Attorney C. Samuel Sutter told the crowd that for years, a bag of heroin cost \$20 on average. Now, around Taunton, he said, a bag can be found for \$7.

Since 2007, Sutter said, overdoses have at least doubled in the county, with admittances to treatment centers rising by nearly 50 percent.

Susan Cyr’s 32-year-old son, Eric, died of a heroin overdose in January. Eric, she said, shot up bad heroin laced with fentanyl in his car in a CVS parking lot on Jan. 24. He died alone and sat in his car for a day before he was discovered.

Although police did not immediately confirm Cyr’s account, authorities across New England have warned people that heroin laced with fentanyl, a powerful narcotic, is a particularly

dangerous and potentially fatal combination.

Throughout Massachusetts, State Police have been compiling numbers to help quantify the spike in heroin overdoses, said David Procopio, a spokesman for the State Police.

“In just about every county in the state, we’ve seen an increase [in usage],” said Procopio. “It’s happening in the city, it’s happening in towns, it’s happening across the socioeconomic spectrum,” he said.

Taunton police have developed a strategy this month to combat the abuse of heroin and opiates in the city, and have posted it on the department’s website.

“The grade of the heroin on the streets of Taunton is high,” Taunton police stated in their strategy plan.

“The price is low. Cheaper than cocaine. Cheaper than painkillers. Because of the low price and purity of the heroin in Taunton, we have become a regional market where individuals as far away as New



Hampshire will come to Taunton to purchase it.”

“We are currently on track to have more heroin overdoses in the first three months of the year than we had in the entire year of 2013,” the department’s plan said.

Advocates at the community meeting stressed that most users do not start off with heroin, but transition to the drug after first being prescribed opiates to treat pain. “Not everyone began as an addict; sometimes they began as a patient,” said Joanne Peterson, founder of Learn 2 Cope, a support group for relatives of drug users.

<http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/02/18/month-and-half-overdose-heroin-taunton-community-gathers-address-spike-usage/jZud80JHqpIYYnwVw7pYqI/story.html>