

Wake County program follows up with opioid OD victims to get treatment

By:

Kelly Kennedy

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RALEIGH, N.C. (WNCN) - Many Wake County first responders feel like they've hit a wall as the number of calls for opioid overdoses are rising and paramedics are often called to revive the same victims over and over.

In the opioid epidemic, paramedics like Benji Currie are on the front lines.

According to the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, in Wake County 118 people overdosed on opioids from January to May this year, compared with 78 during the same months in 2017.

These days Currie never leaves home without naloxone -- the drug that can give addicts on the brink of death a second chance.

"Some folks would argue that it's an enabler," said Currie. "I think it's allowing a risky behavior to be a little safer."

Currie says, surprisingly, most people don't seek treatment after being revived from an overdose.

“You see some of the same patients that are cycling through the hospital systems,” said Currie. “They’re not getting the resources they need.”

County leaders and public health officials came up with the rapid responder program.

“We knew that there needed to be an outside-of-the-box approach to try and offer a safer and a better alternative,” Currie said

The program is a partnership between Wake County EMS and Healing Transitions, a long-term drug addiction facility in Raleigh. The program recruits recovering opioid addicts like Gina Musa to reach out to addicts after an overdose.

“I always say I’m not here to tell you what to do but I want you to know that somebody’s here to listen to you or help you in any way if possible,” Musa said.

Musa battled a heroin addiction for nearly 20 years. She left her children, turned to prostitution and she overdosed, too -- more than once.

“I thought either I’m gonna die or I’m gonna go find some help,” Musa said.

Now two years sober, Musa wanted to give back. Just 24 hours after an overdose she rides with paramedics to the addict’s home and encourages them to seek help.

She then follows up with phone calls and texts.

“A lot of people I work with are like I wanna do what you do when I get better because there’s never been anything really like this you know,” said Musa. “People who have actually been through it.”

The program got off the ground in April and they’ve already managed to get multiple people into treatment.

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