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Responders get training for new injector kits

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BY ED HOWELL

A meeting was held with area volunteer fire departments recently to train for new naloxone auto-injectors that will prevent opioid overdoses, thanks to a company grant making the kits free of charge to first responders.

State officials and fire department representatives met Monday, May 14, at Beville State Community College in Jasper to train in the use of Evzio, a naloxone auto-injector. Its maker, Kaleo, will provide Evzio kits to volunteer departments in Alabama for the next three years.

The \$12 million grant from Kaleo was announced at a May 2 press conference in Montgomery. According to the Montgomery Advertiser, state Sen. Gerald Dial, who worked on obtaining the company grant, said that day the grant will put the devices in 872 rescue vehicles around the state.

Jamey Durham, the director of prevention, promotion and support with the Alabama Department of Public Health, participated in the training in Jasper on May 14. Among those also attending were Dial and Senate Majority Leader Greg Reed, R-Jasper, and Steven Wilson, the acting director of the Alabama Emergency Medical Services.

With the current grant, a statewide training blitz is being performed with first responders throughout May, with kits also being distributed at the same time, Durham said. Then the state will move on to resupply.

"If they use one of the kits, we can resupply them, once they provide all the information needed to get the kit back out to them," Durham said.

Jennifer Hagood, a pharmacist at Five Points Pharmacy, said she was asked to attend to represent the Alabama Pharmacy Association. She noted departments from Curry and Carbon Hill were represented, as well as from Graysville, Homewood and others from surrounding areas. About 40 people were attending.

"I think it is a great thing," Hagood said, noting doctors are beginning to prescribe it more and that volunteer firemen, once trained, can use it instantly to save a life if they come upon someone who is overdosing then to opioids. "If you go too long, there is no chance of saving them," she said.

Durham said using the Evzio kits to save lives are part of a three-pronged approach to the state's opioid crisis. Next will be to get the patients into treatment and deal with behavioral therapy.

"The Department of Public Health, the Department of Mental Health, the Board of Pharmacy, the Alabama Pharmacy Association and others are looking at other strategies or tactics we can use to tackle the epidemic," he said. "The way you really overcome the epidemic is getting people into treatment and then trying to change behavioral therapy."

The idea came out of the Gov. Kay Ivey's Alabama Opioid Overdose and Addiction Council, he said. One report from the council noted, "From 2006 through 2014 there were 5,128 deaths from overdoses in Alabama. The state's death rate per 100,000 in 2014 was 14.9. The number of overdose deaths climbed 82 percent from 2006 to 2014. In 2016 there were 741 overdose deaths attributed to the increase of 15.3 deaths per 100,000. The overdose deaths are not limited to opioids, but the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has indicated prescription opioids and heroin account for the majority of drug deaths.

"In 2012 Alabama was first place in the nation for per capita opioid prescriptions with 143.8 prescriptions per 100 residents. While the rate per capita is decreasing each year in Alabama, the state was still the highest per capita opioid prescribing state in 2016 with a rate of 121 prescriptions per 100 persons, which is equivalent to 1.2 prescriptions for every man, woman and child in our state."

Figures compiled by 24/7 Wall. St., an online site for equity investors, that has recently stated that Walker County is the county with the worst drug problem in Alabama in terms of having 47.5 annual drug deaths per 100,000 in population.

Durham said there are hopes that the grant might could be renewed in three years.

"The goal is to put a kit on each volunteer truck throughout the state," he said. "It's a great opportunity to help tackle the opioid epidemic in the state of Alabama."

The Advertiser reported Kaleo has given out 300,000 auto-injectors to first responders since 2014, with the idea the injection can keep someone breathing until emergency treatment can be given.

In a statement, Reed and Dial praised the effort.

"Our rescue squad members are heroes, and I'm glad to have worked with Senator Dial and Kaleo in securing these much-needed kits to help our rescue squads in the field," Greg Reed said.

"The opioid epidemic has had a devastating effect on towns and communities across Alabama," Dial said. "Kaleo should be commended for stepping up and offering these kits free-of-charge to Alabama's rescue squads. It will mean the difference between life and death for someone – a son, a daughter will be able to live because of these kits."



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