

November 8, 2017

Combined Law Enforcement Roundtable on Opioid Crisis

To the Panel;

My apologies for being unable to attend this very important meeting, and I want to compliment the Michigan Sheriff's Association, in cooperation with the National Sheriff's Association, for spearheading this critical problem that we face in our communities.

Certainly, the most obvious concern is that the law enforcement community finds itself – again – as the recipient of a social problem that we cannot fix. As the opioid epidemic spread throughout our communities over the past several years, local government, along with the medical and mental health communities kept looking to law enforcement to mitigate the problem. Unfortunately, like so many other issues we face, we cannot just arrest our way out of this problem.

The best we could do was to implement temporary intervention programs to address the escalating overdose rates, just to try and save the lives of the users. Our Legislators further compounded the problem by passing Public Act – 307, which prohibited the arrest of individuals for possession of illegal drugs if they called for a medical intervention in an overdose event. Although well intended, the law certainly supports the notion that we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. However, those possession charges - at the very least - provided an opportunity for a more aggressive intervention that might include incarceration. In speaking with many people who suffered addiction problems in the past, jail time forced them away from the drug and offered an opportunity to seek long term treatment.

I am not suggesting that we turn our already overcrowded jails into drug rehabilitation centers. To the contrary, we have too many detainees in our jails already whose crimes were the result of their addiction. Long-term treatment is the key to solving the problem and at the very least, with the Courts involvement; mandatory rehabilitation can be a part of the sentencing for a simple possession charge, which can be expunged with successful completion of treatment. However, the big hole in all of this; is the lack of treatment capabilities.

For the short term, we are faced with the moral dilemma of intervening in an overdose situation with an application of Narcan to save the person's life, only to have them return to their addiction, sometimes only hours later. Due to the inclusion of fentanyl and carfentanyl, those Narcan applications have become as much of a threat to the first responders as it is to the user.



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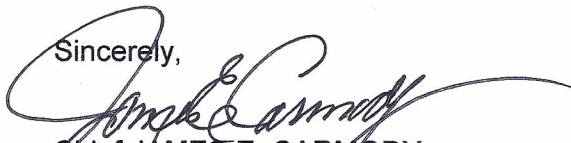
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Some progress seems to have been made in working with the pharmaceutical distribution community, as some of the national chains have taken a position of reduced prescription quantities, but more needs to be done in the medical prescription and pharmaceutical manufacturing arenas. I once had a physician tell me that he is, "...my friend." If he feels that a certain pain medication is required for an illness or injury, and then prescribes what the insurance carrier for that person allows. It's then up to the patient to be judicious in the use of that drug. He also pointed out that due to the regulations set forth in the ACA, his failure to treat properly can be cause for low survey numbers that affect his compensation.

One final thought. Recently, Federal narcotics officers seized more than 200 pounds of fentanyl. They estimated that the seizure contained enough lethal dosages of pure fentanyl to kill more than 40 million people. It defies logic and common sense to allow the manufacture and distribution of a chemical compound that poses such a significant risk to the general public. Currently, most of this drug's manufacturing takes place in China, then sold to the Cartels in Mexico. One could only imagine the international uproar if they were openly producing Ricin or Anthrax powder and selling it to an open market. We need to begin to pressure the Federal government to start putting significant pressure on those who are manufacturing these compounds.

Again, I appreciate the efforts you are putting forward to address this critical issue.

Sincerely,


Chief JAMES E. CARMODY
Director of Police and Fire Services
Wyoming Department of Public Safety

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