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## Overdoses in Franklin County are focus of both prosecution and treatment

By John Fuddy

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A white board hanging in the Franklin County prosecutor's office is running out of space to write the names of those charged with providing drugs that caused fatal or nonfatal overdoses.

The board contains the names of 12 people who have been indicted for one or more counts of involuntary manslaughter.

The latest name added is Shawn W. Point, 30, who was indicted last Friday on charges of involuntary manslaughter, corrupting another with drugs and trafficking in drugs. He is accused of selling drugs that led to the Sept. 21, 2015 overdose death of Sean D. Herman, 26, and the near-fatal overdose of Herman's 27-year-old girlfriend at their apartment on East Broad Street in Bexley.

Herman's death was caused by an overdose from the combined effects of fentanyl and morphine that prosecutors say Point sold to the couple. He also has been indicted on an involuntary manslaughter charge in Fairfield County in connection with the fentanyl overdose death of Nicholas Cline on September 14, 2015.

Such cases didn't use to result in prosecutions because law-enforcement often didn't investigate them as anything other than overdose deaths, O'Brien said.

The names of 13 people indicted for nonfatal overdoses, which brings a felony charge of corrupting another with drugs, also are listed on the board.

The board, maintained by Assistant Prosecutor Carol Harmon, has been growing since 2015, when Chief Deputy Rick Minerd of the county sheriff's office decided it was time to take a new approach to dealing with the problem of opiate addiction and those who feed it.

He created the HOPE Task Force, which stands for Heroin Overdose Prevention and Education. Those who survive overdoses are directed toward treatment. Those who provide the drugs that cause overdoses are investigated with an aim toward prosecution.

"We're focusing our enforcement efforts on those who are causing deaths, those who are cutting their product with fentanyl and other synthetic drugs" that contribute to the growing number of overdoses, he said.

The majority of those indicted for causing fatal and non-fatal overdoses in Franklin County were investigated by the task force.

A closer look at the list shows that three of the defendants have gone to prison after pleading guilty to causing deaths and three have been sent to prison after pleading guilty in non-fatal overdoses. The rest of the cases, other than a defendant who died after his arrest, are pending.

Prosecutor Ron O'Brien announced in 2015 that his office would work with the task force to scrutinize every overdose death in the county. He assigned Harmon and Assistant Prosecutor Jamie Sacksteder to work with the task force.

Minerd convinced the county commissioners to fund two deputies and a sergeant for the task force. The Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board of Franklin County provided funding for a social worker from Southeast Inc. to assist with getting overdose survivors into treatment.

Last year, Minerd said, 65 percent of the survivors encountered by the task force agree to schedule an appointment to begin treatment. Of those, 50 percent showed up for their initial appointment.

Minerd said many of those who hear about the task force have "a misconception that detectives are now social workers.

"We're still arresting people, but we have a better understanding of what addiction is, what resources are available and how to refer people to those resources."

**[jfuttty@dispatch.com](mailto:jfuttty@dispatch.com)**

**[@johnfuttty](#)**