

SPECIAL REPORT THE FINAL INSTALLMENT OF A THREE-PART SERIES

Just One Pill - Part 3

Forget dealers—new generation of addicts go straight for the medicine cabinets

By RONALD SCAGLIA
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Gaining Control

Those parents who are aware of the drug problem on Long Island might still not take the necessary precautions to ensure that their children are safe. Experts warn that this is a mistake.

The mom of Jenny*, (her name has been changed for this article) the 20-year-old recovering heroin addict who began her drug downfall with just one pill at her high school homecoming, realized that her ninth-grader was stealing her medications, so she began hiding them, an action the professionals encourage.

"Families don't want to think it could happen to them, but it does," warns Bruce Goldman, director of Substance Abuse Services at the psychiatric facility, Zucker Hillside Hospital in Glen Oaks.

And the experts also strongly advise parents—and grandparents—to be vigilant. Although it seems improbable, just one pill missing from a medicine cabinet could be an indication of a problem. At minimum, it could mean that a teenager is attending a

pharm or pill party and used that missing pill to gain admission.

Dr. Stephen Dewey, director of molecular imaging at North Shore-LIJ, says that there are many animal studies, which show that a single dose of a drug will get an animal to self-administer the drug continuously. In addition, he added that participants often take more than a single dose when at a pill party, either by being pressured into taking multiple pills or by drinking the portion of pills dissolved in alcohol.

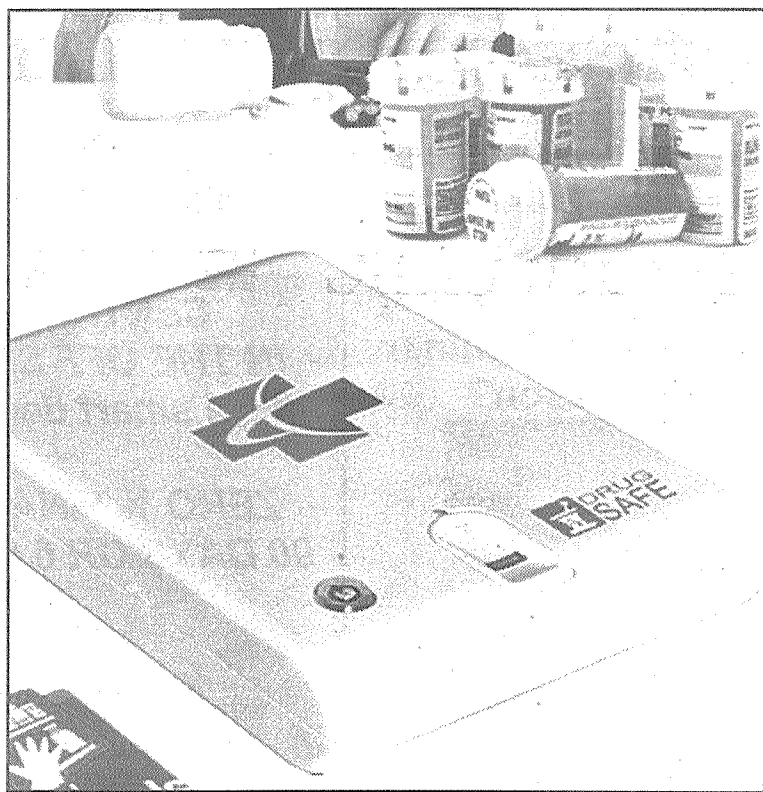
"Very much so," replies Goldman when asked if one missing pill should cause parents concern. "Your pills shouldn't be in the medicine cabinet, they should be locked away and hidden."

And another area of concern is the adverse reactions that can occur even with just one exposure to drugs. As with the teen girls who reacted to dialysis medication and penicillin they took at a pharm party, one dose of the wrong medication can have lethal side effects. Making the problem worse, young people who are participating in a party where substances are being abused are reluctant to call for help out of fear of being caught or think that

the youth has simply passed out and only needs to sleep it off. Therefore, those who do become ill may not get the necessary and prompt treatment that is required.

"It's the most common thing you hear," emphasizes Dewey. "When you overdose on an opiate, you stop breathing. But before you stop breathing you fall asleep. So what happens is typically the kid just starts to pass out. They die from respiratory arrest. The kid passes out in another room or they pass out right where they are and they stop breathing and no one notices."

Janice Talento, CEO of Drug Free Long Island and president of Drug Free Massapequa, strongly urges parents to maintain contact with their children when they are out with their friends. By contact, she means directly speaking with their child and not communicating through a text message. She explains that teenagers who know they will be drinking or taking prescription pills may make arrangements with a friend to text their parents at a certain time to pretend that everything is fine. She added that a parent speaking with a friend of her children who says that everything is



Experts recommend keeping prescription pills in a secure location such as a lock box. Photo courtesy of Drug Free Long Island

okay is not sufficient. She stresses that a parent should demand to speak directly to their child.

"The majority of the time, these kids are doing things, somebody goes into an overdose and they all run, because no one wants to get caught," Talento says.

She also says that another disturbing trend is for drinks, including nonalcoholic beverages such as soda, to be spiked with substances when someone is not looking. Therefore she urges her children and everyone else, to be in constant

observation of any drinks they are having at a party and to get a fresh one if a drink is left unattended.

Adding insult to injury, Dewey says that those who do overdose can be treated with a drug called Narcan (naloxone), which he explains reverses the effects of opiates instantly. In fact, he said physicians speak of their experiences of being presented with a patient who is unconscious from opiates. The physician treats the

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First Public Meeting On Town Redistricting Held May 7

Very few town residents attend; next meeting scheduled for May 21

By LINDA PORTNEY GOLDSTEIN

The first public meeting of the North Hempstead Temporary Committee on Redistricting took place in an almost empty boardroom at Town Hall on Monday, May 7. There were fewer than 20 people in attendance.

At the first opportunity, the few community members present, including two representatives of the League of Women Voters, took the town to task for not properly notifying town residents and blamed the town for the "poor turnout" on such an important topic.

The Honorable Barbara Donno, one of the eight committee members, also expressed concern about the lack of "ade-

quate notification" to the public. One of the town's attorneys somewhat defensively pointed out that "the town had exceeded the minimum procedure for notification." That comment did not go over well with the people in the audience or the committee members.

The town's attorney, Simone Friedman, said that notification would have been in the legal notices section of the local weekly papers. Attendees argued that issuing a prominent press release would have been more in keeping with the spirit of adequate notification on such an important issue. The committee members seemed to agree.

The members of the Committee on Redistricting are an esteemed group con-

sisting of judges, academics and officials of local villages. The committee members were surprised by the complaints related to notification. It appears that they took the public comments very seriously. Just three days after the meeting, the town issued a press release notifying residents of the next two meetings of the committee.

Sid Nathan, director of communication for the Town of North Hempstead, said that notices for the May 7 meeting had appeared prominently in print and online versions of *Newsday*, were featured on the town's website and TV station and on Councilwoman DeGiorgio's website. As to the criticism regarding local newspaper notification, Nathan said,

"We will do better in the future."

Nathan went on to outline the plan for publicizing the next two meetings of the committee. The plan includes robo calls, notices in print and online and the availability online of relevant materials, such as maps, in advance of the meeting, so they can be reviewed by the public. The next meeting scheduled for May 21 at 7:30 at Town Hall, 220 Plandome Rd. in Manhasset, will also be webcast.

Some town officials believe that the critics in the audience were politically motivated, saying the speakers wanted to make the predominantly Democratic town board "look bad." But, representatives of the League of Women Voters echoed the frustration regarding lack of notification.

Redistricting Committee Public Meeting Set For May 21

By LINDA PORTNEY GOLDSTEIN

Chairman John Riordan and the Temporary Redistricting Committee of the Town of North Hempstead announced on May 11 that a public meeting on town council redistricting would take place Monday, May 21 at 7:30 p.m. at Town Hall, located at 220 Plandome Road in Manhasset. The redistricting process occurs every 10 years to ensure that council district lines are in conformity with the most recent census figures.

Prior to making recommendations to the town board on possible revisions to the

council district lines, the committee invites all residents to attend the May 21 public meeting and review possible revisions. The committee will make plans available online and webcast the Monday evening meeting.

The committee invites the public to comment at its public meeting, and will accept written comments until Friday, June 1. All information can be located online by clicking the Redistricting Committee link under Town Updates at www.NorthHempsteadNY.Gov. Written comments should be addressed to the committee at: Temporary Redistricting Com-

mittee, 220 Plandome Road, Manhasset, NY 11030 or emailed to feedback@northhempsteadny.gov.

Following the public meeting, the committee will host a work session on June 4 at 2 p.m. at Clinton G. Martin Park in New Hyde Park. The public is welcome to attend this work session to observe its proceedings.

The announcement by the town was made in response to the criticism voiced by the attendees at the May 7 meeting of the committee. There were fewer than 20 people in attendance out of more than

226,000 residents in the town. Critics said the town had not met their obligation for adequate notification.

Sid Nathan, director of communications for the town, responded to the criticism by saying that the notice was prominently featured in both the print and online versions of *Newsday*. The notice was also featured on the town TV station, the front page of the town website and Councilwoman DeGiorgio's website, Portal2Port.

For more information on the scheduled meetings please call 311 or visit www.NorthHempsteadNY.Gov.

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patient with Narcan, who then wakes up, makes an obscene gesture and walks out of the hospital. So, while Narcan can save a life, there needs to be a desire for help afterwards.

The problem has been brought to the forefront by the tragedies that have occurred on Long Island due to prescription drug abusers. In April of 2010, a then 18-year-old Kayla Gerdes, was driving while high on drugs, when she jumped a curb, and ran over and killed a Hempstead doctor who was mowing her front lawn, according to Nassau District Attorney Kathleen Rice. In addition to the charges related to the crash, Gerdes was also found to be in possession of a stolen doctor's prescription pad and a pill bottle containing 22 Oxycodone pills and 29 Xanax pills.

"Kayla Gerdes took the wheel when she was high on drugs, recklessly took the life of an innocent woman, and cruelly showed no remorse," Rice said. "This case illustrates the tragic consequences of drugged driving."

This past New Year's Eve, John Capano, a Massapequa resident and an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives was killed in a shooting in Seaford when he intervened and tried to apprehend a suspect who entered a pharmacy, announced an armed robbery and demanded cash and drugs. The suspect was also killed in the exchange.

There was the horror in Medford when junkie David Laffer shot and killed four innocent victims when robbing a pharmacy of prescription pills. His wife, Melinda Brady, had reportedly become addicted to painkillers after undergoing oral surgery two years earlier. Laffer also became addicted, and after losing his job, he turned to armed robbery and murder to obtain the pills. At his sentencing, he alluded to prescription pill abuse and doctor shopping.

So, that one pill can have resounding effects.

What advice do the experts have for parents to protect their children through these dangerous times? The first is to get rid of excess prescription drugs within a household and to keep the necessary medications out of the reach of their children and other visitors to their home. Talento's organization recommends parents keep their medications in a lock box that requires fingerprint identification in order to be opened.

"Knowing that pharmaceutical addiction begins with a pill that was in someone's medicine cabinet, we realize the importance of getting parents to keep a closer eye on the med-

ications in their home," says Assemblyman Saladino. "That's why I have created a medicine cabinet registry and resource tool kit to help parents track prescriptions and to send a message to their children that they are watching closely."

"Parents should either have a locked medicine cabinet or should police the stuff [or] not have it in the first place," agreed Dewey.

Parents are also urged not to take a cavalier attitude toward drugs, including marijuana and alcohol, which are still being used as gateways into additional substance abuse. Almost all of the addicts who contributed their stories for this article stated that their problem began with alcohol before eventually escalating into the prescription pills. The experts warn that some parents do not become overly concerned about their children experimenting with marijuana, as they may have done so in their own youth. And, of course, having kids see their parents doing drugs or abusing alcohol, which a number of the interviewed junkies in the stories have experienced, sets the worst possible example.

Nassau County Police Detective Pam Stark, says she was once asked by a youth, "How come our parents are smoking [marijuana] every night?"

Parents should also watch for symptoms that indicate something might be wrong. Talento stresses that if a student exhibits a change in grades from excellent grades to something lower, parents should seriously investigate to determine if there might be an issue. She also said parents should be concerned if their children seem apathetic about issues that they used to be very concerned about, such as their appearance. Talento additionally warns parents to be concerned if their children stop making eye contact with them.

"They need to know warning signs," Talento advises parents.

Goldman concurs. He said a decline in hygiene might be a warning signal as is not engaging in usual activities. He also says that parents should watch for not fulfilling role responsibilities, sleeping excessively, always being tired, being removed, and being isolated. Furthermore, he urges parents not to make excuses for things that don't make sense such as money or medication that is suddenly missing.

Goldman also strongly urges parents to accept the situation if there is a problem and to seek treatment. He says that research shows that treatment does work and the ear-

lier it is begun, the more effective the treatment will be. "Treatment works," says Goldman. "People get w. People lead normal lives."

Dewey also stresses the importance of having meaningful discussions with their children. He speaks with his child several times per week and encourages others to do so.

"Find out what's going on," urges Dewey. "See how the doing. See if anything in their life changes. What you'll with kids who start to abuse drugs is their brain dopan starts to change so their behavior will start to change."

And perhaps the most important thing that parents can do is to be aware of the potential problem and educated about it. In her presentations to parents, St advises them to go through their children's Facebook pages and also look at the messages and contacts their cell phone, as she has done with her own child. She rationalizes that if a parent is paying for a phone that parent has the right to examine it without concern of invading their child's privacy. She stresses that being educated is the best way to combat what could be a very serious problem.

"It's everywhere and the only way we're going to combat this is by being aware," she stresses.

And that's the most bitter pill of all to swallow. ☹

For more information:

The Addiction Treatment Services of Zucker Hill Hospital, Littauer Building, First Floor, 75-59 263 Glen Oaks, (516/718) 470-8950

Long Island Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (LICADD), 114 Old Country Rd., Suite 114, Miramonte, (516) 747-2606, www.licadd.com.

SAFE Inc., Glen Cove City Hall, Room 204, 9 Glen Cove (516) 676-2008, www.safeglencove.org.

YES Community Counseling Center 75 Grand Ave Massapequa (516) 799-3203. www.yesccc.org.

Safeguarding medications:

LOCKMED Medical Product Company, www.lockmed.com, (888) 458-2746.

Information on Assemblyman Saladino's task force as well as that tool kit can be found by visiting www.assembly.state.ny.us/mem/Joseph-S-Saladino.

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