

Dealing with the Opioid Crisis in Rice County.

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Rice County suffered four opioid deaths from overdose in 2016, tying the previous high of four in 2008. Between 2000 and 2007 there were 4 opioid overdose deaths in Rice County, from 2008 to 2016 there were 19 more opioid deaths.

Rice County law enforcement and other agencies have implemented a number of strategies to deal with this growing threat. Emergency responders and law enforcement agencies have worked to distribute Naloxone to those likely to be first on the scene of an overdose. Naloxone can be used to reverse the effects of an overdose and save a life that would otherwise be lost. The Rice County Chemical Health Coalition has led the fight to increase the availability of Naloxone in emergency rooms, in first aid kits carried by law enforcement, and to make it available from pharmacies. Many public buildings have started to have Naloxone available for emergency use.

Earlier this year, Faribault saw its first death caused by carfentanil. Carfentanil is a powerful opioid used as an elephant tranquilizer. Carfentanil is so concentrated, it has 10,000 times the strength of a similar sized dose of morphine. Exposure to a dose the size of two grains of salt can cause death.

Dealing with the improper use of prescription opioids presents a growing challenge. A number of cities and counties from around the country have sued the manufacturers of prescription medications as another method of coping with the increasing cost of treatment and criminal conduct caused by substance abuse.

In general, the lawsuits allege the manufacturers of prescription medications used deceptive marketing to convince doctors that opioids could be used to treat chronic pain without a risk of abuse or addiction. The lawsuits allege that by misrepresenting the risks, the manufacturers greatly increased the use of opioids in the United States.

Some of the lawsuits have also targeted wholesalers, arguing the wholesalers failed to monitor the distribution channel and report suspicious orders of prescription opioids. Manufacturers and wholesalers have been successfully sued by private parties and by the U.S. Department of Justice. Purdue Pharma, manufacturer of Oxycontin, paid one of the largest criminal fines in history for mislabeling of Oxycontin. McKesson, one of the largest wholesalers of opioids paid \$150 million to settle claims made by the Department of Justice.

Dakota, St. Louis, Hennepin, Steele, Ramsey, Anoka, and Washington counties have already announced plans to sue to recover the damages for increased costs of treatment, criminal justice and public health caused by opioids. Other counties are still evaluating their options. Rice County has not yet reached a decision, but is continuing to evaluate the effectiveness and value to the county of joining the litigation.

In the meantime we continue to pursue criminal charges where appropriate for those involved in the street level trade of illegal drugs. Where proof is available, we will pursue murder charges against the dealers whose product causes a death. In addition, my office has joined Dose of Reality, doseofrealitymn.gov, an effort coordinated by the Minnesota Attorney General, prosecutors, and other community partners around the state. Dose of Reality champions many of the initiatives made real in

our community by the Rice County Chemical Health Coalition, such as our successful Take it To the Box program for safe disposal of unneeded prescription medications, and opioid overdose toolkits. Complex problems require more than one approach to solve them and we will continue to work with community partners and colleagues to attack the opioid epidemic while carefully exploring all options available, including litigation if appropriate.