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OPIOID CRISIS

# Team of 'recovery navigators' in New London help combat opioid crisis

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# INTERACTIVE MAP: THE NORTHEAST OPIOID

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NEW LONDON, Conn. (WTNH) — Dr. Paul Joudrey, from Yale School of Medicine, and Jess Morris, a recovery navigator, are on their way to make some house calls of sorts.

They are part of a larger team and effort to fight opioid addiction in New London county. Dr. Journey prescribes Suboxone to those who might not seek treatment at a doctor's office which can be intimidating.

Dr. Joudrey said, "Kind of the innovation I'm adding is I'm able to meet them in the community."

Morris said, "When somebody's ready to get treatment, you got to get them when they're ready because their mind can change very quickly."

The team is called "OAT", which stands for The Overdose Action Team. The team includes police, fire, and healthcare advocates who meet once a month. They first take action about a week after firefighters respond to an overdose.

"Even our guys just felt a sense of we weren't doing enough," New London Fire Chief Thomas Curcio said. "We'd transport them to the hospital. Never really feel as though we know the outcome or anything."

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“The goal isn’t necessarily to get people treatment, it’s just to show them there’s people who care,” Stepanian said.

Recovery navigators are there to talk, offer support and options if they want them.

Stepanian added, “They don’t have to go to rehab for 90 days anymore, there’s other ways finding recovery.”

Jen Muggeo from Ledge Light Health District said, “The Overdose Action Team is this idea of coordinated access. That people should be able to easily access support and information and if they want treatment.”

That’s where Dr. Paul Joudrey comes in.

He said, “What I do basically is make it easier for them to start Suboxone and then we hand off care to a local community provider.”

During the last 18 months, this team has been able to reach more than 300 people in the community and it has seen positive results.

“If we had a repeat individual that would maybe relapse again. We’re not finding that now. The numbers are down,” said Fire Chief Curcio.

On the flip side, they’ve seen the number of people who continue care with a cooperating clinic go up.

“When you increase access in a community to medication based treatment the rate of overdose death declines,” Muggeo said.

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The CARES Project stands for Coordinated Access, Resources, Engagement, and Support.

Dr. Joudrey said, "We want to give people opportunities to make positive change."

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