Cuyahoga County, local institutions in campaign to prevent opioid deaths

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

Cuyahoga County, local media and marketing companies, hospitals and other institutions are in the midst of a campaign to educate the public on the risks of prescription opioid abuse leading to addiction to illegal drugs and death.

More than 600 Cuyahoga County residents died from heroin, fentanyl and cocaine-related deaths in 2016. The county is on track to lose up to 850 people this year due to the drugs, according to Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish.

“We are trying everything, literally everything, we can,” Budish said of reducing the opioid epidemic.

The “Know the Risks” campaign focuses on prescription opioid abuse because many people may not realize that taking a prescribed drug can lead to addiction.

“I think a lot of people don’t understand the addictive nature of these opioid prescriptions, and once you are addicted it’s easy to progress to heroin or fentanyl or some mixture, which are deadly,” Budish said.

The campaign began April 5 with local advertising agencies creating campaign materials on a volunteer basis. The MetroHealth System and St. Vincent Charity Medical Center both donated $25,000 to the otherwise-volunteer initiative and also developed new protocols for reducing opioid prescriptions, in connection with the initiative.

The Cavs, Downtown Cleveland Alliance and the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority are donating advertising space to the campaign. The Cleveland Jewish News also is donating advertising space.

“It’s across the board, the media has been very supportive of helping us get the messages out and this will be something that’s ongoing, not a one time effort,” Budish said.

Budish and Eliza Wing, chief communications officer for the county who spearheaded the project, said the campaign has already gotten the attention of municipalities nationwide.

“We looked around to try and find examples, and we couldn’t find anything like this,” Wing said. “What we are hoping is people around the country will take these materials because they are free to use.”

National Prescription Drug Take Back Day is April 29. Anyone who has unneeded prescription drugs in the home is encouraged to dispose of them at a local facility, including police stations. Liquid drugs are not accepted.

“Last year, we collected more than 10,000 pounds of prescriptions, but we want to substantially increase that if we can,” Budish said. “The fewer opioids in the home, the better.”

Budish emphasized that opioid addiction could affect anybody, including a high school student prescribed opioids after a sports injury, or a 40-year-old prescribed pain medicine for an illness.

“When you hear the terrible, heart wrenching stories about people who have died, or who’ve had children die, I mean it’s anybody,” Budish said.

To learn more about the campaign, visit knowtherx.org or the campaign’s Twitter account, @KnowTheRx.
Local family to take fight to DC over new health care proposal

ED CARROLL | STAFF REPORTER
ecarroll@cjn.org | @EdCarrollCJN

Debbie Isaak-Shapiro knows how hard it is to see her child in pain. Isaak-Shapiro’s son, Josh Shapiro, lives with Crohn’s disease, a chronic inflammatory bowel disease that affects the intestines, and Isaak-Shapiro said the disease sometimes leaves Shapiro unable to function, often leaving him too tired to go out and do things.

Shapiro is 27, and after an initial diagnosis at age 16, has been on different medications to help manage the disease, for which there is no permanent cure. Isaak-Shapiro said. He uses biologic agents delivered either through injection or IV, treatments which work for a period of time, usually between one to three years, before he has to switch to something new. He goes to the hospital about every eight weeks for a treatment.

“They’re very costly drugs,” Isaak-Shapiro said. “And insurance companies don’t like to pay for them.”

Isaak-Shapiro said the hardest part for her is seeing her child in pain. Isaak-Shapiro also said she’s a type 1 diabetic, so she understands the fear of living without insurance.

Former magistrate claims she was fired for being Jewish

ALYSSA SCHMITT | STAFF REPORTER
aschmitt@cjn.org | @AlyssaSchmittCJN

A former Butler County magistrate has sued the southwestern Ohio county and a common pleas court judge, alleging she was required to use vacation days to observe Jewish holidays and also was discriminated against for being Jewish.

Kimberley Edelstein of Cincinnati filed a discrimination lawsuit May 5 claiming Judge Greg Stephens terminated her employment when she asked to take eight days to celebrate Jewish holidays in October 2016, according to the lawsuit. She is seeking more than $1 million in damages.

“At this point, all I can say is there is no merit to the allegation she is saying,” Stephens told the Cleveland Jewish News. He declined further comment.

Butler County does not have a policy that accommodates holiday time off for members of non-Christian faiths.

Prosecuting Attorney Mike Shapiro moved on to heroin. Marks, 33, has been in addiction recovery for more than 12 years, is part of the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. Attorney’s Heroin and Opioid Task Force. He speaks at programs and to the task force, which includes Northeast Ohio leaders, law enforcement, medical professionals and clergy, in the hopes that his story will prevent addiction and deaths around region. To him, it seems like such an epidemic has been a long time coming – considering the over-prescribing opioids and new, stronger drugs, such as fentanyl, that popped up in recent years.

“You kind of are in denial,” Marks said. “You don’t think about it as you have a problem, you just kind of go into autopilot and it gets worse, and worse and worse and you start making excuses for everything.”

The story of addiction is becoming “worse, and worse and worse” in Northeast Ohio. A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation examining 2015 opioid overdose deaths found that Ohio was the leading state for opioid overdose deaths, with 1,800 deaths per 100,000 people. Based on current trends, Cuyahoga County is on track to lose more than 850 people this year due to drug overdoses, which would be an “awful” record, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish said.

Opioid epidemic impacts Jewish community

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

Aaron Marks, a resident of the Ohio City neighborhood of Cleveland who grew up in Beachwood, said his opioid addiction experience involved a relatively common path.

First was the innocent – yet too unknowingly too large – opioid prescription after wisdom teeth surgery. Then came experimenting with pills from friends’ medical cabinets. And in college, Marks moved on to heroin.

“You kind of are in denial,” Marks said. “You don’t think about it as you have a problem, you just kind of go into autopilot and it gets worse, and worse and worse and you start making excuses for everything.”

The story of addiction is becoming “worse, and worse and worse” in Northeast Ohio. A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation examining 2015 opioid overdose deaths found that Ohio was the leading state for opioid overdose deaths, with 1,800 deaths per 100,000 people. Based on current trends, Cuyahoga County is on track to lose more than 850 people this year due to drug overdoses, which would be an “awful” record, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish said.

Marks, 33, has been in addiction recovery for more than 12 years, is part of the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. Attorney’s Heroin and Opioid Task Force. He speaks at programs and to the task force, which includes Northeast Ohio leaders, law enforcement, medical professionals and clergy, in the hopes that his story will prevent addiction and deaths around region. To him, it seems like such an epidemic has been a long time coming – considering the over-prescribing opioids and new, stronger drugs, such as fentanyl, that popped up in recent years.

“You kind of are in denial,” Marks said. “You don’t think about it as you have a problem, you just kind of go into autopilot and it gets worse, and worse and worse and you start making excuses for everything.”

The story of addiction is becoming “worse, and worse and worse” in Northeast Ohio. A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation examining 2015 opioid overdose deaths found that Ohio was the leading state for opioid overdose deaths, with 1,800 deaths per 100,000 people. Based on current trends, Cuyahoga County is on track to lose more than 850 people this year due to drug overdoses, which would be an “awful” record, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish said.

Marks, 33, has been in addiction recovery for more than 12 years, is part of the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. Attorney’s Heroin and Opioid Task Force. He speaks at programs and to the task force, which includes Northeast Ohio leaders, law enforcement, medical professionals and clergy, in the hopes that his story will prevent addiction and deaths around region. To him, it seems like such an epidemic has been a long time coming – considering the over-prescribing opioids and new, stronger drugs, such as fentanyl, that popped up in recent years.

“You kind of are in denial,” Marks said. “You don’t think about it as you have a problem, you just kind of go into autopilot and it gets worse, and worse and worse and you start making excuses for everything.”

The story of addiction is becoming “worse, and worse and worse” in Northeast Ohio. A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation examining 2015 opioid overdose deaths found that Ohio was the leading state for opioid overdose deaths, with 1,800 deaths per 100,000 people. Based on current trends, Cuyahoga County is on track to lose more than 850 people this year due to drug overdoses, which would be an “awful” record, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish said.

Marks, 33, has been in addiction recovery for more than 12 years, is part of the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. Attorney’s Heroin and Opioid Task Force. He speaks at programs and to the task force, which includes Northeast Ohio leaders, law enforcement, medical professionals and clergy, in the hopes that his story will prevent addiction and deaths around region. To him, it seems like such an epidemic has been a long time coming – considering the over-prescribing opioids and new, stronger drugs, such as fentanyl, that popped up in recent years.

“You kind of are in denial,” Marks said. “You don’t think about it as you have a problem, you just kind of go into autopilot and it gets worse, and worse and worse and you start making excuses for everything.”

The story of addiction is becoming “worse, and worse and worse” in Northeast Ohio. A report by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation examining 2015 opioid overdose deaths found that Ohio was the leading state for opioid overdose deaths, with 1,800 deaths per 100,000 people. Based on current trends, Cuyahoga County is on track to lose more than 850 people this year due to drug overdoses, which would be an “awful” record, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish said.

Marks, 33, has been in addiction recovery for more than 12 years, is part of the Northern District of Ohio’s U.S. Attorney’s Heroin and Opioid Task Force. He speaks at programs and to the task force, which includes Northeast Ohio leaders, law enforcement, medical professionals and clergy, in the hopes that his story will prevent addiction and deaths around region. To him, it seems like such an epidemic has been a long time coming – considering the over-prescribing opioids and new, stronger drugs, such as fentanyl, that popped up in recent years.
OPIODS IN THE JEWISH COMMUNITY
Carole Schwartz Rendon, former U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio, who helped start the opioid task force, said the opioid epidemic impacts the Jewish community similarly to the larger community, which often starts with a prescription for painkillers that turns into an addiction. However, it can be hidden due to stereotypes about addiction.

“I still talk to people who are like, ‘Oh, I heard that was happening in Cleveland,’ and I’m like, ‘No, no, no, it’s happening on your street,’” Rendon said.

Rabbi Robert Nosanchuk, senior rabbi at Anshe Chesed Fairmount Temple in Beachwood and a member of the opioid task force, pinpointed the problem in the Jewish community more conceptually. He said as a people, Jews sometimes like to see themselves as “whole and safe,” which makes accepting addiction difficult.

“We like to see ourselves as moving positively through society without carrying the burdens of addiction,” he said.

Nosanchuk also said Jewish cultural experiences that encourage excess also may not help prevent addiction. He pointed to the Purim tradition of encouraging observers to drink so much alcohol that they can’t tell the difference between Mordechai and Haman — or good and evil.

“That has a kind of a sound to it that you don’t hear that coming from the pulpit at a Catholic church,” he said.

One trend Nosanchuk said he’s noticed is when talking to people in the community about addiction, they use coded language to describe it, like saying one “is struggling with his demons” — euphemisms that don’t help the problem get the attention it deserves.

“You don’t want to malign someone, but if you are never exposed to the idea that it exists, then you might not consider yourself an addict, but meanwhile you are popping opioid pills every day,” he said.

“The ALL OF THE ABOVE APPROACH”
Rendon said when the U.S. Attorney’s Office began working on opioid addiction, they noticed early on that it was primarily a health care problem, rather than law enforcement. Thus, while the U.S. Attorney’s office, along with Cuyahoga County, is pursuing strategies like going after 20-year minimum mandatory incarceration sentences for drug dealers whose selling resulted in an overdose death as part of an “all of the above approach,” targeting medical professionals is also key.

She said area hospitals are changing protocol for prescribing opioids, which includes making sure doctors prescribe minimum amounts necessary and keeping tabs on doctors who prescribe the most. Moreover, hospitals are starting to monitor patients who have been on opioids for a long time and could be at risk for addiction.

“We are all conditioned to when a doctor prescribes something or when a dentist prescribes something, (think) it’s in our best interest. We should take it,” she said. “And none of us are sufficiently educated to really interact with our medical providers and ask them, ‘What is this and why?’”

Cuyahoga County also has initiatives that include an ongoing public information campaign called “Know the Risks.” Media and marketing companies, including the Cleveland Jewish News, are donating time and ad space for messages that educate consumers about the dangers of prescription opioids.

“I think a lot of people don’t understand the addictive nature of these opioid prescriptions, and once you are addicted, it’s easy to progress to a heroin or a fentanyl or some mixture, which are deadly,” Budish said.

Moreover, those working on mitigating the epidemic realize that for people already addicted, decreasing risk of death is pertinent. Since last year, Narcan — a safe drug that reverses opioid overdose — is now available for purchase without a prescription at CVS drugstores in Ohio. Emergency responders also carry it.

The county’s initiatives also include improving capacity for treatment. Budish said the county has tried to lobby federal officials to improve coverage for treatment under Medicaid, which is the top insurance payer for treatment, though they have been unsuccessful thus far. However in January, the county, the city of Cleveland and the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County assembled funds to add 113 treatment beds.

“It’s not enough, but it’s important,” Budish said.

WORKING FROM WITHIN THE COMMUNITY
Rendon said one way the Jewish community could do more to combat opioid addiction is for rabbis to either speak about it from the pulpit or invite a guest speaker to talk — a strategy local churches have embraced. Moreover, she said people like Marks who share personal stories of addiction help people better understand the problem.

“He can talk to you passionately about the need for family support and for people to understand that this is a disease and it needs to be treated as such,” she said. “It helps to make it real to people so they fully realize, this could happen to you.”

Nosanchuk said he became involved with the opioid task force to gain insight from the meetings that he could impart to other clergy and community members. He also said for opioid addiction treatment, it’s important to increase resources in the Jewish community, as people appreciate getting support in the company of others who share a cultural and religious background.

The only drug prevention and treatment center in the county that has a Jewish background is Bellefaire JCB, which is for youth. However, Bellefaire COO Jeffrey Lox said that they don’t typically see youth with opioid abuse problems, but are concerned that they could gain access to parents’ prescriptions and are working on prevention strategies toward that end.

According to the ADAMHS Board, middle-aged adults make up the average age range of people dying from heroin overdose deaths. There is no local Jewish drug inpatient treatment facility for adults.

Moreover, Nosanchuk and Rendon both said speaking out honestly about the perversiveness of the risks could do a lot of good, for both adults and teenagers.

Nosanchuk said he recently saw Ohio Gov. John Kasich come here and say it at Fairmount Temple, “He can talk to you passionately about the way the drugs change him understand the way the drugs change him. It’s not enough, but it’s important,” he said.

A STORY OF RECOVERY
Marks, who was raised attending The Temple-Tifereth Israel, now in Beachwood, and had his bar mitzvah there, said that he also has seen a tendency in the Jewish community to say “it’s not happening here.”

After becoming addicted to heroin in college at the University of Cincinnati, by way of prescription pills while attending Beachwood High School, he decided at 20 to get clean. Marks was moved toward recovery by finding out simultaneously that a good friend died from a heroin overdose, and another friend — also a Beachwood graduate who is still sober — checked into rehab. Marks called it a “crossroads” moment, yet it took him six to eight months before seeking help.

Once Marks got past detox and to a treatment center, he said learning about the medical process behind addiction helped him understand the way the drugs change one’s brain chemistry and make sense of the problem.

“I feel like I’m lucky because some people remain in denial through treatment and they push away the answers, whereas, I’m like, ‘Oh ok, so that’s why I kept going when other friends stopped,’” he said.

Marks said in the midst of a growing regional problem, it’s important to see the upshot — that people can recover and lead drug-free lives.

“I think people see so much about death, they don’t hear enough about people getting better,” Marks said. “It does happen.”

However, now as a board member of Stella Maris Cleveland, a detox center; and Recovery Resources, a behavioral health nonprofit, Marks said with the addiction crisis getting worse, it’s time to act.

“Especially in Northeast Ohio, the Jewish community has incredible resources, both financially and politically and you know, people could really come together and make an impact on the problem,” he said.
Dettelbach announces Ohio Attorney General candidacy

ALYSSA SCHMITT | STAFF REPORTER
aschmitt@cjn.org | @AlyssaSchmittCJN


“The law applies to protect people who are vulnerable and hold people accountable who are powerful,” he told the Cleveland Jewish News. “That's what the rule of law means. But it doesn’t happen by itself, there has to be people who are willing to fight to make that idea into a reality. That’s why I’m running for attorney general.”

Dettelbach, a member of Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights and Pepper Pike, resigned Feb. 5, 2016, as U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of Ohio after serving more than six years in the position. Since stepping down, he’s practiced law at Baker Hostetler in Cleveland.

The announcement comes after Dettelbach recently toured southern and eastern Ohio cities, including Chillicothe, Portsmouth, Marietta, Athens, Woodfield, Steubenville and Youngstown to learn and listen to possible constituents.

“I learned there are a lot of people, really good, really hard-working people, all throughout Ohio who are feeling left out and they are feeling left behind and many ways forgotten,” he said. “They’re not asking for gifts, they’re not asking for handouts, they’re asking for someone to fight to make sure there is a level playing field for them.”

While touring, Dettelbach also heard of how the opioid crisis is devastating Ohio families. He feels more resources should be made available for treatment and law enforcement.

“Over the last years, we’ve been cutting or forcing them to fund their own and not helping them out,” he said.

Though he announced his candidacy following his trip, Dettelbach has considered running for months. He first told the CJN he might seek to return to public service in July 2016.

Current Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine is expected to run for governor in 2018 but hasn’t officially announced his candidacy. Current Ohio Auditor Dave Yost announced earlier this year his intention to run for attorney general in 2018.

During his decades-long career, Dettelbach has prosecuted cases ranging from terrorism to corruption.

“When I was U.S. attorney, we investigated and prosecuted – working with the FBI – cases involving Al Qaida affiliates, cases involving Hezbollah recruits, (and) cases involving ISIS recruits, and I was proud to be able to lead an office and work with great law enforcement to do those cases,” he said.

The natural unpredictability of the job doesn’t worry Dettelbach.

“One thing I’ve learned from 20 years as a prosecutor is that you can’t predict a case that’s going to come in front of you,” he said. “What you can predict is that it’s not easy to fight for people, and anybody who thinks it’s easy hasn’t practiced law for long enough. … I’m a fighter and I want to fight for Ohio.”

Dettelbach is a graduate of Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Mass. The 1984 graduate of Hawken School in Chester Township earned a bachelor’s degree in 1988 from Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H.

National leaders focus on opioid crisis at Clinic forum

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

M ore people died in Cuyahoga County last year from overdoses of heroin and fentanyl than homicide, suicide and traffic accidents combined, according to a report released last week from the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner. Including prescription drugs, 666 people died of drug overdoses in the county last year.

The opioid epidemic is one area where government leaders, as well as law enforcement and health professionals, mutually are willing to admit vast failure. Such a sentiment was apparent among Chuck Rosenberg, Acting Administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, U.S. Surgeon General from December 2014 to April 2017, during a Cleveland Clinic Community Healthcare Forum on the local and national opioid crisis May 25 at the Global Center for Health Innovation in downtown Cleveland.

Rosenberg said the opioid epidemic affects all of the U.S. and “we are not doing a good enough job right now.”

In the panel moderated by Cleveland Clinic CEO and President Dr. Toby Cosgrove and attended by about 1,000 people, Rosenberg answered questions about how the DEA is getting drugs off the streets by way of exchanging information with China, where some of the illegal drugs come from, and trying to cut off supplies from Mexico. He also said it’s important to regulate prescription distributions with doctors and hospitals, and law enforcement can only assist with public health solutions.

“Addiction is absolutely a public health issue – law enforcement has a role,” Rosenberg told the Cleveland Jewish News. “We don’t prosecute or seek to incarcerate addicts, in my view.”

Murthy agreed with Rosenberg that reinvigorating the War on Drugs – a push since the 1970s to prevent drug abuse that emphasizes law enforcement in a way that has been well documented to disproportionately contribute to mass incarceration of minorities – is not the answer.

“When we start to recognize that addiction is indeed a chronic disease of the brain, then we can start to treat it like we do diabetes or heart disease, as a medical problem that deserves the same care, compassion and the same urgent attention that those illnesses do,” Murthy said.

Ohio was the leading state for opioid deaths in 2015, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. The panelists said there is no clear answer why the epidemic has hit Ohio especially hard, other than it is sometimes connected to poverty, the focus needs to be on solutions.

In an interview with the CJN, Cosgrove said Cleveland Clinic has reduced the number and dosage of opioid prescriptions and doctors and other health professionals have become “increasingly aware” of drug abuse signs in patients.

Cosgrove also said potential cuts to Medicaid or people losing coverage due to changes to or a repeal of the Affordable Care Act is of concern. Medicaid is the top insurance payer for opioid addiction treatment, according to the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation.

“I’m concerned about it for the hospitals, I’m concerned about it for the public,” Cosgrove said.

The forum was a day after the Congressional Budget Office found that the Republican health care bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives could increase the number of people without health care coverage by 23 million by 2026.

Murthy also said insurance coverage needs to be more accessible and elected leaders need to show “moral leadership” in fighting the epidemic in such ways.

“If you are serious about addressing opioid addiction in America, you have to be serious about expanding coverage, because those two go hand-in-hand,” Murthy said.

ON THE COVER
Zion Karasenti, from left, Yitzhak Yifat and Haim Oshri, the three Israeli paratroopers, stand in front of the Western Wall in Jerusalem on June 7, 1967, during the Six-Day War. | Photo / David Rubinger
Lyndhurst family reflects on loss of daughter to build speaker series on drug addiction

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

Lyndhurst resident Sheryl Hirsh remembers how her daughter, Melissa Rae Koppel, “begged” her to attend Jewish day school as a 9-year-old so she could “say tefillah every day.” As a child, she wanted to be a rabbi, and later, a physical therapist with a focus on children.

Instead, on May 9, 2013, Koppel died of a heroin overdose after becoming addicted to the drug by way of a prescription drug.

HELPING IN HOUSTON
Clevelanders see Harvey damage firsthand

ED CARROLL | STAFF REPORTER
ecarroll@cjn.org | @EdCarrollCJN

Scott Fisher described what he saw in Houston after Hurricane Harvey hit as “devastating.”

Fisher, a Solon resident, went to Texas Aug. 31 with Dr. Jeffrey Turell, a Beachwood resident who is a Texas native, to help out with rescue and cleanup efforts.

Despite leaving late Aug. 31, Fisher and Turell didn’t get into Houston until late on Sept. 1, as it took the two 29 hours to travel there. The two hit the remnants of Harvey in Louisville, Ky., and also faced heavy rains in parts of Tennessee.

Fisher, the executive director of cardiovascular medicine at Intrexon Corp., which is...
of an OxyContin prescription for constant migraines she suffered from for years. She was 23.

For more than three years now, Hirsh has had one goal: to stop the same thing from happening to other families.

One way she’s done so, in addition to regularly speaking publicly about her daughter and opioid addiction, is by creating a speaker series on substance abuse for Case Western Reserve University’s Siegal Lifelong Learning Program, whose season kicks off Sept. 14.

During an interview following an opioid overdose control, four out of five new heroin users started with an addiction to prescription opioids.

While studying between The Ohio State University in Columbus, Cleveland State University and Cincinnati State, Koppel became addicted to the prescription. Hirsh suggested she stop taking it and Koppel, then 22, joined a Cleveland Clinic pain rehabilitation and withdrawal group. Her life appeared to be on track.

She still had migraines, however, and began using heroin to relieve them, after being introduced to it by a boyfriend. She used the drug for about a year before her overdose death, Hirsh said.

“I didn’t know anything about it until the day she died,” said Hirsh, adding Koppel had overdosed a year earlier and was medically treated, which Hirsh did not know at the time.

“When she died, the place that she had been going to meetings, they were shocked,” Hirsh said. “She was still going to the meetings and they said to me she wanted to be a meeting leader and they thought she was one of their success stories.”

Koppel was buried on Mother’s Day. Hirsh said there were more than 100 cars that went to the cemetery and she continued to receive condolence letters for more than a year. She did not tell almost anyone the true cause of Koppel’s death initially.

“I was afraid that those that knew her, loved her and thought she was the sweetest, intelligent, most beautiful person they’d ever met, that their opinion of her would change,” Hirsh said. “I didn’t want anyone to all of a sudden think of her as this addict down the street that we all picture in our minds.”

REMEMBERING KOPPEL

Hirsh said she slowly began telling those closest to her about Koppel’s overdose, and to her surprise, only received “encouragement and support” as opposed to the blame and negativity she feared. She kept telling people, including local media, and thinking about how else she and Denny could help others dealing with addiction.

“People don’t get how important it is, and that’s what bothers me the most,” she said.

For more information, visit case.edu/lifelonglearning substance-abuse.

“'They are more silent,' she said. 'Many Jewish people that have had loved ones die or suffer from this disease, they are very afraid and ashamed. It’s the stigma and it’s what stopped me at first, and I wish that other Jews, like myself, that have suffered this can realize the support that you can get.'”

Vince Caraffi, chair of the Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force and now moderator for the Siegel substance abuse series, said Hirsh called him out of the blue a few years ago and said she wanted him to hear her family’s story.

“You have someone who is really offering help,” he said of Hirsh, praising her unique ability to use a tragic situation to help others.

THE SIEGEL SERIES

After telling her story at Park Synagogue in Cleveland Heights and Pepper Pike, Hirsh credited Siegal Lifelong Learning Program Executive Director Brian Amkraut with suggesting she create a program on substance abuse. Hirsh, who has worked at Siegal, now as assistant director, for 21 years, said she initially had reservations because she had never created a program before. But it worked. She is starting the third year of the program.

Hirsh said they have built “a lot of buzz” around the program, yet it’s still hard to attract some crucial crowds.

“The people that really should come are the parents of high school- and college-age kids … and they are the hardest people to get,” she said, citing parents likely believe opioids do not affect their families, even if they might.

“We're trying to find someone who can help, to reverse opioid overdoses. That's what bothers me the most, and it's what bothers me the most,” she said.

Of the speakers in the upcoming series, Hirsh said she’s looking forward to hearing about the work of Project DAWN, a community-based overdose education and naloxone distribution program. Naloxone, also known as Narcan, is a medication that can reverse opioid overdoses.
I
n the face of rising overdose deaths, financial costs and strain on communities and first responders, East Side suburban leaders are working to identify new ways to combat the opioid epidemic.

Mayors and police chiefs from Beachwood, Orange and Lyndhurst discussed their strategies and the multi-faceted issues they face in a “Suburban challenges: Mayors’ call to action” panel discussion Nov. 16 at Landmark Centre in Beachwood that was part of Case Western Reserve University’s Siegal Lifelong Learning Program’s substance abuse series.

The panelists were Beachwood Police Chief Gary Haba, Beachwood Mayor Merle S. Gorden, Lyndhurst Mayor Patrick A. Ward and Orange Police Chief Christopher Kostura. Vince Caraffi, chair of the Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force, was the moderator.

The county expects a record 781 people to die from drug overdoses this year, compared to 666 last year.

Haba and Gorden said although Beachwood hasn’t experienced the scale of reported overdoses as other communities that have been hit harder by the epidemic, they do see such cases and first responders carry Narcan, a medication that reverses an overdose. Gorden, who is also Beachwood’s safety director, said city police and rescue squads are well-equipped to deal with the epidemic, which he said will not improve until education progresses and stigmatization ends.

“All our safety forces are trained to handle situations like this, and I don’t care how many times you see something like this or somebody in distress, you never get used to it and it makes it even more intense as the years go on,” Gorden said. “We spare no expense when it comes to anything police or fire.”

Haba and Gorden also discussed the financial impacts related to drug abuse in their city, including those related to prevalence of shoplifting among addicts and the cost of services for people who don’t live in Beachwood but have a drug-related crisis while in the city. Such costs impact Beachwood, but the city ultimately has financial resources to deal with them, where other municipalities may not, Gorden said.

Haba said about a third of shoplifting suspects in Beachwood are in some way affected by chemical dependency, mostly opioids.

“It’s not just the shopkeepers and storeowners and corporations that are losing their money or being impacted financially,” he said. “When you are caring for someone like this in a jail setting, they require special care, which takes manpower to do,” citing medical care, transportation and other costs to the city.

Ward said there’s not a day that goes by without his learning more about the problems surrounding opioid addiction and how to address it. He said knowing about resources available is vital and he highlighted Lyndhurst’s Safe Passages initiative, which allows addicts to seek treatment or help at the police department and not be charged with a crime. (If other warrants are outstanding, the department helps negotiate them with the individual).

Ward told the story of a mother from Sandusky who called in her son to Lyndhurst police. The mother thought her son was living under a bridge near Cleveland at the time and was addicted to opioids. The woman asked if the police could help and not arrest him since she heard they were a Safe Passages community, and Ward said the officer told her, “We will go get him. I don’t care where.’”

“And they did. They went and got him cleaned up, clean clothes and fed. He had some warrants, but they helped him take care of that. They helped get him whole again.”

The drug epidemic affects the emotional well-being of first responders. Ward said he’s recommended compassion training for first responders to help fight stigma surrounding addiction.

The epidemic also affects local hotels across East Side suburbs, Kostura said, as it’s common for people to go to one to use drugs and, consequently, overdose there. He told a story about finding a woman dead from an overdose at one of the hotels, and then realizing the woman was the sister of an acquaintance. He discussed the toll it took on him not only as someone responding to a dead-on-arrival call, but as a community member who then had a personal connection to the epidemic.

Ward also discussed the need for recovering addicts to alter their social circle if it involves drugs, and to be aware that if they relapse, their tolerance to the drug will have diminished, making the threat of overdose stronger.

“It’s so much more difficult for the addict because they have to make such a change, first off not using the drug again, and you pretty much as family members have to remove all their friends because whoever it was that they were hanging with is doing the same thing,” Kostura said. “Their lifestyle has to change so much, it’s so very difficult.”

Ward and Gorden also talked about allocating resources to education on the epidemic, both in schools and community forums, and discussed the role officers in schools have in getting to know students and identifying issues.

Caraffi also explained prescription opioid addiction leading to heroin addiction, and how a culture that “has a pill for everything” makes everything more complicated. As alluded to throughout the talk, he explained how multi-faceted the epidemic is and how messy it is to deal with a problem that involves and impacts an odd combination of law enforcement, medical professionals, educators, the pharmaceutical industry, courts, city leaders and other industries.

“I’ve been in public health going on 28 years and this is probably the most complex issue I’ve ever been involved with,” Caraffi said. “The number of things that are involving us in this epidemic and the reality of what we are seeing on the streets, it’s scary.”

“I don’t care how many times you see something like this or somebody in distress, you never get used to it and it makes it even more intense as the years go on.”

Merle S. Gorden
Beachwood Mayor

“When you are caring for someone like this in a jail setting, they require special care, which takes manpower to do.”

Gary Haba
Beachwood Police Chief

“I don’t think there’s a day that goes by that I don’t learn more about this problem and how to address it.”

Patrick A. Ward
Lyndhurst Mayor

“(Addicts’) lifestyle has to change so much, it’s so very difficult.”

Christopher Kostura
Orange Police Chief

“I’ve been in public health going on 28 years and this is probably the most complex issue I’ve ever been involved with.”

Vince Caraffi, Chair
Cuyahoga County Opiate Task Force
New mikvah moves ahead with donations, plans construction

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

The Cleveland Community Mikvah is likely to begin construction in February or March 2018 and is moving ahead full force with its fundraising efforts.

Cleveland Community Mikvah board president Danny Gottesman and vice president Rabbi Avrohom Adler said that after receiving approval from the city of University Heights in February, the new 5,800-square-foot mikvah is likely to be approved by the city’s architectural review board in the next month or so.

The mikvah – a ritual pool of water used for physical and spiritual purification – will be at 2588 S. Green Road and will be solely for women. It is needed due to the expanding Orthodox Jewish community, as the nearby women’s mikvah at The Stanley and Esther Waxman Community Mikvah at the Waxman Chabad Center in Beachwood is at near full capacity, they said.

“With the projected growth of the community and even without growth – just the current size of the community – we’ve greatly surpassed that,” Gottesman said. “The new mikvah will triple in size.”

While the Chabad mikvah has four preparation rooms and one mikvah for women, the Cleveland Community Mikvah will have 14 preparation rooms and two mikvah pools built to the highest halachic standards. It also will have accommodations for the physically challenged, ample parking, increased security and sufficient lighting, according to the building campaign’s brochure.

Gottesman and Adler, who also manages finances for the Chabad mikvah, said there is concern it cannot handle higher usage. Moreover, once the new mikva opens, Gottesman said they anticipate the Chabad mikvah will transition to stay open for men and vessel immersion.

The fundraising goal for the project is $3 million and almost $1.6 million has been pledged. Construction is expected to cost about $2.2 million, while architect fees will total about $200,000. The mikvah board also aims to raise funds for the first five years of its operating budget, which is “conservatively estimated” to be between $500,000 and $600,000, Adler said.

Although the start of construction is weather dependent, Gottesman said he’s hopeful the mikvah will open about nine months after construction begins, likely around December 2018.

The Cleveland Community Mikvah board, which also has a women’s advisory board, held a women’s only event Dec. 10 to discuss the new mikvah, which included a virtual presentation of 3-D mikvah renderings, floor plans and its technology, as well as a talk by Judge Ruchi Freier, New York City Criminal Court judge and the first Chasidic woman to be elected to public office in the United States. More than 400 women attended.

The Cleveland Community Mikvah’s location, although just a few blocks from the Chabad mikvah, is also intended to be more discreet and less viewable from other local Jewish institutions.

“This is a project that reaches people throughout the community – no matter what synagogue they belong to, no matter what school their children attend, no matter where they work, where they live,” Adler said. “We’d like it to be a convenient location and we’d like it to be accommodating to all women.”

Moreover, Adler and Gottesman said visiting the mikvah is intended to be a pleasant experience and the new mikvah will not only be visually appealing, but will prevent women from experiencing excessive wait times that are likely to occur with the current local mikvah offerings as the community grows.

Other mikvahs in the area include the Charlotte Goldberg Community Mikvah on the grounds of Park Synagogue Main in Cleveland Heights, the Heights Community Mikvah in Cleveland Heights and at Solon Chabad in Solon.

“Ultimately, no woman will ever be turned away under any circumstance,” Gottesman said. “It’s going to be a unifying force within the community.”

To learn more about the Cleveland Community Mikvah, visit ccmikvah.org.

Hillcrest communities launch opioid initiative

AMANDA KOEHN | STAFF REPORTER
akoehn@cjn.org | @AmandaKoehnCJN

Highland Heights, Lyndhurst, Richmond Heights, Mayfield Heights and Mayfield Village have launched a Safe Passages Initiative, a program where individuals addicted to opioids can seek assistance and accelerate their placement into treatment, effective Dec. 19.

The cities’ police departments announced in a news release that anyone facing opioid addiction may walk into any of those police departments between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. weekdays and receive expedited placement in a detox or treatment program, without fear of arrest.

Those seeking help will be interviewed by a trained police department member, have paperwork completed and have arrangements made with an appropriate detox or treatment center. Placement is expected to take fewer than 72 hours.

Last month, Lyndhurst Mayor Patrick A. Ward said in a mayor’s forum on opioid addiction that the Safe Passages Initiative, which was already in effect in Lyndhurst, helped a mother and her son who was addicted to opioids. Although the mother was in Sandusky, she knew her son was in Northeast Ohio and asked Lyndhurst police to help after hearing they were a Safe Passages community. Ward said the officer on the phone told her, “We will go get him. I don’t care where.”

“And they did,” Ward said. “They went to Solon and got him cleaned up, clean clothes and fed. He had some warrants, but they helped him take care of that. They helped get him whole again.”

The police departments of the five cities involved are part of a law enforcement partnership, Suburban Police Anti-Crime Network, which shares training and resources to maximize law enforcement, prevent crime and reduce costs.

The Safe Passages Initiative will be overseen by S.P.A.N.’s drug enforcement unit, which also will continue to aggressively target drug traffickers, the release said. S.P.A.N. drug enforcement team members also recently participated in a law enforcement summit hosted by Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative in Boston.

“Our officers were able to network and learn best practices from law enforcement professionals who traveled to Boston from 27 different states, sharing with us how they manage and implement their outreach and intake programs,” said Michael Scipione, S.P.A.N. drug enforcement unit commander. Those seeking help, either for themselves or a family member or friend, may also call the police departments anytime for more information.

Highland Heights Police Department: 440-442-1221
Lyndhurst Police Department: 440-442-1234
Mayfield Heights Police Department: 440-442-2323
Mayfield Village Police Department: 440-461-1234
Richmond Heights Police Department: 216-486-1234