

Thank you for designating the entire meeting tonight to addressing the opioid crisis.

I am here to speak as a member of SOAR Natick. SOAR is a support group we started two years ago for family members with a loved one suffering from Substance Use Disorder – more commonly called addiction.

Addiction, especially to opiates, is a long and difficult journey for everyone it touches. It can result in parents are asking kids to leave their home, siblings distancing themselves, even marriages falling apart. The stories are painful and heartbreaking.

Worst of all, young people are dying.

It is happening right here in our community and there are no boundaries to who it might touch. In every neighborhood in Natick someone knows of someone dealing with this disease. You may think that it won't touch you – you have “good” kids and a nice family. You might volunteer at school, coach sports teams, or give back to the community in some other way. You take vacations as a family and know your kids friends. Guess what? There is no guarantee that doing all the right things will protect your kids and your family.

Addiction to opiates often begins with a prescription following procedures almost all of our kids go through – extraction of wisdom teeth or treatment for a painful injury. Highly addictive pain medications are often prescribed like Percocet, Vicodin and Oxycodone. Early signs of a problem may be that things from your home are missing – jewelry, cash, credit cards and other valuables. This happens when prescriptions run out and addicts begin to purchase their drugs on the street. When the expense becomes too much an addict may turn to heroin as a more affordable alternative.

Yes, people in Natick are using heroin! And it's not as uncommon as you may think.

And the stigma associated with all of this is incredible. You feel so alone.

It is time to recognize that addiction is not just a family crisis; it is a community crisis as well and we need a coordinated effort to address it.

Isn't that what Natick is all about?

Options for treatment are difficult to find. Availability is limited and can be very expensive. Families sometimes use their retirement accounts and remortgage their homes to pay for it.

We can't sit back and watch while lives are being lost. It is time for Natick to be part of the solution.

There is no one place in Natick to find help. Family members need to know where they can go for information for themselves and their addict. Good work is being done by Natick Together for Youth and SOAR, both organizations running without town funding, but we need more. We need social workers or counselors that are skilled at working with addicts. We need materials and resources to offer them. We need information that can be found easily, collected anonymously and reviewed in private.

While Natick Together for Youth is working on prevention, and SOAR is offering families support, and our first responders are saving lives, we need to find a way to take the next step. To do whatever we can to pull these efforts together and offer resources to guide people to treatment.

I want to praise the many departments represented here tonight that have done many things to make a difference. Now it is time for all departments in our town to join together and begin a collaborative effort to help families that are in trouble.

My hope is that you recommend a Task Force be formed, with a representative from each key department within the town, to begin addressing this issue as a community. Some goals for the Task Force might be:

- Appoint one department to take the lead on the opioid crisis and be the “go to” for anyone looking for help
- Gather and prepare resource materials and make them easily accessible
- Provide access to a clinician/social worker as a resource to the community as well as our departments like NPD to be able to guide people in need
- Do more public outreach about the opioid crisis –
 - Develop and use signage to warn and direct the community about things like the Good Samaritan Law and clusters of overdoses.
 - Have warning signs with resource information near “hot spots”.
 - Use electronic signs and Pegasus when appropriate

- Partner with our local emergency rooms to develop a system for how to handle an overdose patient brought in by our first responders
- Partner with local treatment providers
- Improve access to affordable/free Narcan

I thank you for your time tonight for and for your attention to such an important issue in Natick.