

Myra Shah

Journalism Capstone Proposal - JOUR E-599

Proposal is for Fall 2017

October 31, 2016

Topic: Opioid/Heroin Addiction and crisis. The CDC has described the current state as an opioid overdose epidemic. New England, and specifically New Hampshire, have been greatly impacted by this epidemic. Between 2013 and 2014, the CDC reports a 73.5% increase in drug overdose deaths in New Hampshire. The state has responded by distributing naloxone (narcane) kits to save the lives of those who overdose. They also passed the Good Samaritan Law in 2015 to not prosecute witnesses or victims who contact emergency medical care in overdose situations. I would like to write the following articles:

1. Addiction and Opioids

I plan to write an article about opioid addiction and look at prescription medications and heroin. I'll look at what happens physiologically and how an individual becomes addicted to a substance and the challenges of overcoming this disease. I will speak to addiction specialists, doctors and other experts in the field. Why this drug is different. I will speak with experts in this specific field.

Catholic Medical Center in Manchester, NH recently became affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital. One area they will work together on is substance abuse, and they note this in their News Release:

"Mass General has come up with innovative ways to improve access to treatment, smooth transition among care levels, and reduce relapse. CMC will explore ways to adapt MGH's successful programs to attack the opioid crisis in New Hampshire."

Sources: Psychiatrist at the center at CMC, and social worker. An addiction and pain specialist

2. Impact on Community

I will speak with Police departments in communities with highest overdose numbers to see if there are correlations with more crimes. Will request data on crimes related to opioid use.

I will also look at impacts on health and economy in terms of job stability.

Sources: Manchester PD, Jack Wozmak, Senior Director for Substance Misuse and Behavioral Health for the Governor's Office, or a member of his team to look at economic and other impacts on communities

in NH. I will speak with Emergency Department and emergency response personnel in Nashua or Manchester (towns with higher incidences of overdose).

3. Availability of Drugs/Access to drugs.

Would like to report on different ways the drugs reach people. The prescriptions and how people become prescription shoppers. I will speak to doctors who prescribe opioids, pharmaceutical companies. I would then like to focus on heroin and where it comes from and how it gets into communities.

Sources: Doctors (pain clinic), DEA

4. Profile on Treatment Center

My article will profile a treatment center in southern New Hampshire. I will speak to doctors there and detail the recovery options and process. I hope that there may be someone there who would be able to share a personal story with me.

Sources: Southern NH Health's Intensive Outpatient Treatment Center: Potential Sources Frederick Agisim, MD

5. Public Health Response and New Laws

I will write an article on programs and plans that have been put into place to respond to the crisis. I will focus on New Hampshire where I live. There have been laws passed to not pursue criminal charges if someone is called to save someone from overdosing. I'll also look at the response nationally, and compare similarities and differences in other states. I'll work to speak to legislators or organizations focused on driving initiatives.

Sources: Edward Rajsteter, The Friends of New Hampshire Drug Courts. Hope for New Hampshire Recovery

Multi-media aspect

I plan on using visuals like graphs and pictures to illustrate some of the causes of the disease and impacts on individuals, families and communities. If I find a strong personal story, I will do a video portion.

Possible Publisher

I am completing an internship with Patch in NH, and would like to run a series of my articles on the sites.

Capstone Director:

I just took the Investigative Journalism course this past weekend and think that this would be a good topic to work on with Jenifer McKim or Beth Daley from the New England Center for Investigative Reporting. I also enjoyed my very first class with Anna Gorman. This was several years back, but think she would be a great advisor, as well.