

## **WASTED YOUTH UPDATE - Drug to treat addiction now on the streets; Suboxone often used to buy time until addicts' next score**

*By MAUREEN BOYLE  
GateHouse News Service*

It's supposed to be in doctors' offices and drug treatment programs. Instead, it's on the streets.

Suboxone, a drug approved by the FDA in 2002 to treat opioid abuse, is showing up in drug arrests throughout the region as addicts look for ways to stave off agonizing withdrawal symptoms, some until they can get into a program, others until they can get more heroin or OxyContin.

Braintree police last week arrested a couple they said were selling heroin out of their Cotton Avenue home. One of the couple's alleged clients, Sean J. Garvey, 47, of Holbrook, was charged with possession of both heroin and Suboxone after police stopped him. He allegedly had five Suboxone pills and a bag of heroin.

It's a scene being repeated across the South Shore and the country.

In Quincy, the police drug unit comes across Suboxone about once a week, Lt. John McDonough said.

Addicts buy the drug on the street to avoid withdrawal symptoms until they can score their next fix of heroin or OxyContin.

"Like anything else," Scituate police Lt. Mark Stewart said, "It gets abused."

Some are buying Suboxone on the street because they cannot get a doctor to prescribe it or because the cost of a doctor's visit and buying it at a pharmacy is higher than the \$5 to \$10 a pill it costs to buy it illegally.

"My detective said he is seeing parents going out on the street and getting Suboxone for their kids, which is kind of scary," Abington Police Chief David Majenski said.

A single physician can treat up to 100 Suboxone patients if the doctor takes an eight-hour course offered by medical societies and gets a waiver from the Drug Enforcement Administration. Until December 2006, a single medical practice - not physician - was allowed to treat 30 Suboxone patients at a time. The federal government eased those



Liisa Bennett and her son Chris paid \$500 for Chris's first month supply of Suboxone and then \$250 per month to keep up the treatment to fight his addiction to opiates. (GateHouse News Service)

restrictions --because of complaints that there weren't enough doctors to treat the growing need for the drug.

Since more doctors can prescribe Suboxone now, the street value is dropping, said Colleen LaBelle, state director for opioid treatment programs at 15 community health centers.

“In January of 2003, it was on the street for \$30 a pill. Now it is five or 10 bucks,” LaBelle said.

Suboxone is the first medication for opioid treatment available through a doctor's office. It comes in pill form and suppresses withdrawal symptoms and reduces cravings for opioids such as heroin and OxyContin.

Paul M. Brown, executive director of Norcap Lodge, a 40-bed detoxification program in Foxboro run by Caritas Good Samaritan Medical Center in Brockton, said patients using Suboxone need to be monitored to make sure they're getting the right dosage and that they're not mixing it with alcohol or other drugs. If they do, they'll get sick, not high, he said.

Brown said counseling and follow-up care are also key in any Suboxone program.

Lisa Bennett of Taunton said her family bought Suboxone three times on the street until her son found a doctor to prescribe the drug, paying as much as \$200 for five pills to as little as \$25 for 10.

After a few months, she said her son began using heroin again.

“He would use the Suboxone when he couldn't get the heroin,” she said. “He later told us he used it so he wouldn't get ‘dope sick.’”

Even though her son relapsed and is now in a treatment facility, Bennett said she's still convinced Suboxone is a useful tool to treat heroin addiction.

*Patriot Ledger reporters Jack Encarnacao, Kaitlin Keane and Jennifer Mann contributed to this report.*

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