Rivier to host opioid abuse forum

By TINA FORBES
Staff Writer

NASHUA - City agencies, schools and health officials are working to educate the public about the escalating opioid epidemic in the community, and Rivier University is no exception.

"We hear from students weekly about family and friends who struggle with addiction," said Pam Graesser, director of Rivier's Counseling and Wellness Center. "This crisis touches all of us in some way," Graesser said in a statement.

Rivier will host a program developed by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services called "AnyOne. AnyTime.NH," which to discuss addiction, emergency overdose medications and support services for those experiencing addiction.

Open to the public, the event is scheduled for Monday, Feb. 8 from 4-6 p.m. at the Dion Center at Rivier. The program will feature a panel discussion with members of law enforcement, medical experts and rehabilitative support professionals.

Talks will cover heroin and fentanyl abuse, as well as the misuse of other opioids and prescription drugs.

"In 2014, more than 300 people in New Hampshire died as a result of drug overdose, the majority of which have been related to opioids," Karyn Madore said in a statement. Madore, a Rivier adjunct professor and Operations Director and a Senior Consultant with the Community Health Institute, will moderate the event.

The evening is sponsored by the University's Nursing and Social Work programs, the Rivier Task Force on Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drugs and the Counseling and Wellness Center.

Those interested in attending can register online at AnyoneAnytimeAtRivier.eventbrite.com.

New Hampshire is on the front lines of the heroin epidemic, with overdose reports and related deaths climbing alarmingly over the past several years.

The New Hampshire Medical Examiner's office confirmed 385 drug deaths for 2015. The previous year, the state saw a total of 326 drug deaths, and in 2013, that number was 192.

The spike in opioid abuse has prompted a rise in laymen becoming impromptu responders in opioid emergencies, including school principals and nurses seeking training for naloxone administration - the opioid antagonist capable of halting the effects of an overdose.

On Monday, the Nashua School District voted to keep Narcan, the brand name of naloxone, on hand in district schools in case of an overdose emergency. Select staff will be trained in the administration of the drug, which can be used as a nasal spray. School board officials likened the precaution to keeping a defibrillator in schools for health emergencies.

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Berlin school officials also voted to stock Narcan in schools this month, as did dozens of school districts in Massachusetts over the past several months, according to published reports.

In the next two weeks, Rivier will also be stocking Narcan kits and providing training for the nurse practitioners at its health center, according to university marketing director Patricia Garrity.

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