

THE OVERDOSE ANTIDOTE

ONE SHOT
TO LIVE

A nasal Narcan kit is on display during a class for the public in Holbrook in February.

CHUCK FADELY

Narcan saves lives and gives addicts a chance to overcome their addictions

BY JO NAPOLITANO
lidesk@newsday.com

It saved their lives, but it didn't end their addiction.

That's the experience of many drug users who have been revived with naloxone, commonly known by its brand name Narcan, the now widely available one-shot treatment for opioid overdose.

Delivered by injection or nasal spray, Narcan reawakens the brain's breathing reflex center after heroin or other, similar drugs put it to sleep.

Administered in recent years by first responders and ordinary Long Islanders alike, it's credited with saving thousands of lives in a region that continues to grapple with an opioid epidemic — one that killed 442 people in Nassau and Suffolk last year alone.

Those rescued by Narcan have awakened in their mom's house, in a friend's kitchen, on the side of the road, or in a KFC restroom after emergency responders kicked in the door.

Tatiana Green, 27, of Franklin Square was at home with family when she was revived.

"I remember being in the bathroom and my mother coming in," she said. "I was in and out of consciousness. They said I stopped breathing."

A 24-year-old Lake Grove man who asked not to be named likened his Narcan save to waking up at his own funeral.



Lisa Ganz shows how to administer Narcan, a heroin overdose antidote. ■ Video: newsday.com/health

CHUCK FADELY

"I was out for seven minutes and they brought me back," he said.

Some people emerge swinging, startled by the strangers staring down at them. A fire chief from West Babylon suffered a concussion in April after bringing a neighbor back to life.

Some are rescued by Narcan just once. Others are saved multiple times; many continue

using.

"One would think that a near-death experience would make the person want to run to treatment, but the psychological and physiological effects don't always result in that outcome," said John Venza, vice president of Adolescent Services for Outreach Development Corp., a residential drug rehab center that treats 125 teens annually.

Half of the patients he serves each year have used opioids, and a quarter are addicted, he said.

Expert's not surprised

Dr. Michael Delman, assistant professor of medicine at Hofstra and president-elect of The New York State Society of Addiction Medicine, said he is not surprised that people keep using after such a scare.

"Naloxone . . . doesn't have any anti-craving effect," he said.

An addicted person's brain is altered by drug use over time, said Dr. Constantine Ioannou, director of residency training at Stony Brook University Hospital and a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry.

"There are changes in the brain that don't allow them to stop: The accelerator is pushed down, but the brakes don't work anymore," he said.

Those brakes are normally moderated by consequences.

"But the addict brain is rewired — for some reason, when the brain is hijacked by drugs, the memory of consequences becomes impaired," he said.

Some boast about the number of times they have been revived. "I remember . . . groups of young people who were proud to have flatlined," Ioannou said. "They hadn't hit bottom yet."

Those ready to make a change act far differently.

"They look completely beaten down by the addiction," he said, adding that they suddenly realize the full weight of their dependence. "They are focused on recovery. They want to move forward."

Narcan buys them time, he said.

The drug can indeed be a game-changer, said Samuel A. Ball, president and CEO of the National Center on Addiction

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and Substance Abuse and a professor of psychiatry at Yale University.

"It keeps people alive," he said. "It gives them and their families a second or third chance to get some help."

Rescue workers, grateful for the treatment, say they are sometimes frustrated by showing up at the same house where they have saved someone before.

"More has to be done with getting to the root of the problem," said Mark Klahn, 61, an EMT at Community Ambulance Company in Sayville. His company recently committed to on-the-spot or next-day Narcan training for families whose loved ones were revived.

Training people for use

Police and police ambulances on Long Island have used Narcan more than 1,500 times since 2012. They and other groups host training seminars across the region so the drug can be administered by parents of addicted children, and users who can save each other.

A recent training in Holbrook brought out a father helping his son stay clean, and a group of young nursing students looking to bolster their skills.

Jillian Rinaldi also was in attendance. She said she was just 11 when her brother Joseph died of a heroin overdose in September 2005.

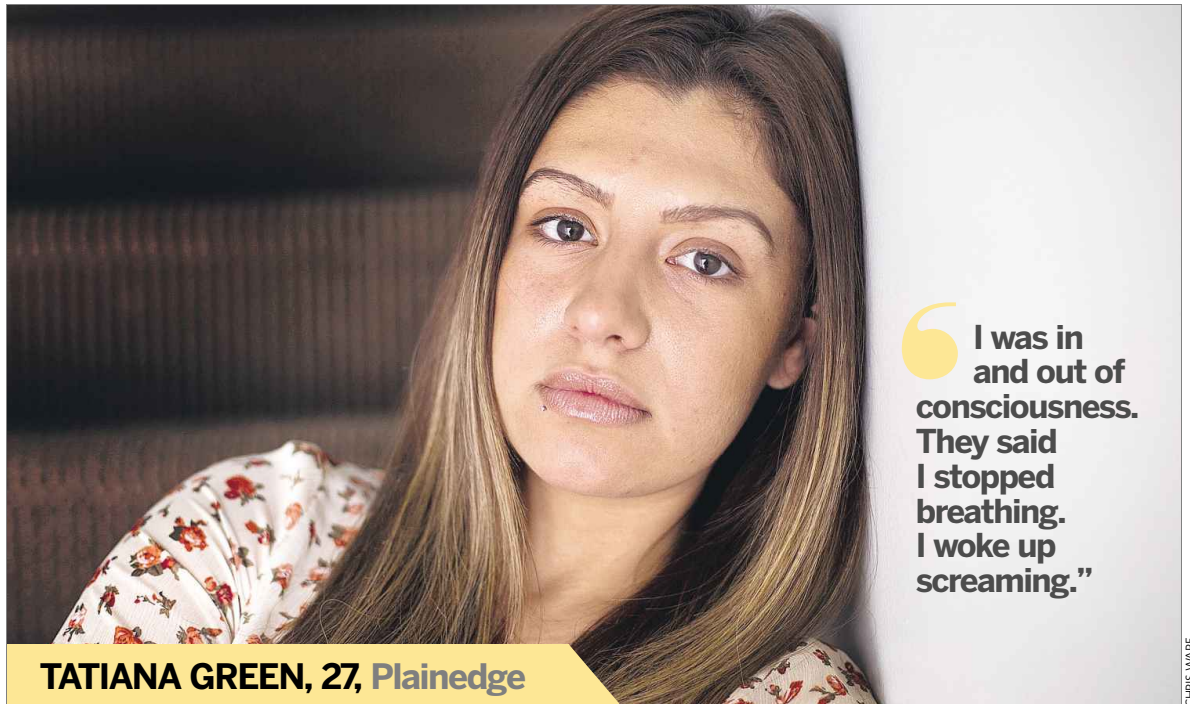
"He never missed a family function," she recalled. "He always made sure I was out doing something. He took me bowling, mini-golfing, go-carting — anything but let me stay at home on the couch."

Rinaldi has wanted to work in the field of addiction ever since her brother's death. She was thrilled to learn of the Narcan class and even happier to see how easy the treatment is to administer.

She wishes it was available years ago.

"Anyone can do it," she said. "Even an 11-year-old."

And while educating the public remains key to saving lives, doctors are trying to better understand the addicted mind. Research shows heroin's effect on young people is worse than on adults: Opioids physically change their still-forming brains.



TATIANA GREEN, 27, Plainedge

I was in and out of consciousness. They said I stopped breathing. I woke up screaming."

CHRIS WARE

Green works in addiction recovery, earning her bachelor's degree at SUNY Empire State College.

Drugs crept into her life early. She was 4 when her father was jailed 10 years for trafficking, she said, taken away in a raid that she and her friends came upon accidentally as they were riding home on the school bus.

"As we passed, our block was barricaded off by police, DEA, feds, et cetera," she said. "My dad was arrested that day. The driver dropped all of the other kids off first and drove around the neighborhood a bit. Then we were taken home."

In high school, Green had a hard time making friends. She said she smoked cigarettes to fit in with an older crowd and quickly graduated to marijuana. Cocaine, ketamine and Ecstasy came next.

Her later addiction to heroin and prescription pills led to eight arrests,

several monthslong jail stints and five visits to rehab, she said.

Green lived for a time in Brooklyn and in Manhattan. Occasionally, she was homeless.

Prescribed oxycodone for kidney trouble, she started pulverizing, sniffing and eventually selling the medication, she said. It was a combination of the painkiller — two crushed pills, straight up her nose — and Xanax that led to her first overdose, the one from which Narcan saved her at age 18.

"I remember being in the bathroom and my mother coming in," Green said. "I was in and out of consciousness. They said I stopped breathing. I woke up screaming."

Green, who grew up in Plainedge, overdosed twice after that. It was the third near-death episode that made her seek help.

Her father, who returned home from jail when she was in high school, quit

drugs and went straight, she said, eventually owning his own company. She begged him and her grandmother to send her to rehab.

She said she shot six bags of heroin before she left for treatment.

"I wanted to die," she said. "When I got there, they nurtured me back to health. I was too sick to feed myself. I was so high. I went to 12-step meetings and they taught me what addiction was and that I wasn't a bad person."

She said she has counseled hundreds of addicts since she stopped abusing drugs.

"I don't give up on anybody," she said. "We are all worth saving. All of us."

DATE SHE STOPPED USING DRUGS: April 19, 2011

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Ioannou said many of those now caught up in heroin addiction were first turned on to the drug after they experimented with their parents' or grandparents' prescription medications.

He said the trend started 10 to 15 years ago when the medical community began focusing on pain management. High-potency painkillers became available in millions of American households.

Heroin addicts who spoke with Newsday support his as-

sertion. Nicholas Garbarini, 30, of Bellport, said he started smoking pot at 12 and moved on to his father's Vicodin by 16.

"Any kind of social anxiety was lifted," he said. "It put me in a state where everything was OK."

Garbarini, who was treated with Narcan on three occasions, eventually underwent drug treatment and said he has been clean since 2014.

The biggest problem with opioids, Ioannou said, is that

their pull is so strong.

"The only thing more addictive is meth," he said.

Suzanne Segovia, a senior probation officer assigned to the specialized addiction unit of Suffolk County, has been working exclusively with heroin addicts for six years.

She currently has 39 probationers. Her typical client, she said, is white, 24, middle class — mostly men, but some women.

All are addicted or in recovery, she said.

"Nobody comes in and says, 'I love being a heroin addict,'" Segovia said. "It's a curse. It's a lot of work. They have to use drugs to maintain a normal life. It's not about getting high. They are just trying to not be sick."

She wishes families weren't shamed into isolation.

"It shocks me that there is not more help available," she said. "I think probation is the greatest thing for a heroin addict. At least in that case, someone can help them navigate treatment."

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LONG ISLAND

NICHOLAS GARBARINI, 30, Patchogue



RANDEE DADDONA

Garbarini, a carpenter, skateboarder and self-proclaimed misfit in junior high, started smoking pot at 12 and tried OxyContin four years later. He said he stuck with prescription pills for the next two years, but as they grew scarce and expensive, he moved to heroin.

Garbarini wanted to make a change in his life: He relocated to Texas and later to Denver to escape his habit. It didn't help.

"I didn't care about myself," he said. "I just needed to get high."

Garbarini said he was treated with Narcan three times. The first save came when he was 20 and was using with several friends in a Bellport Village house.

One person passed out in the driveway. After police revived him, an officer walked through the home and heard the unmistakable gurgle of someone whose brain was no longer commanding him to breathe, Garbarini said. It took two doses of Narcan to bring Garbarini to life. He "came to" shaking and convulsing.

The second save happened in Garbarini's mother's house.

The last, at age 24, was in a KFC bathroom on Route 112. In that case, someone kicked down the door to get him out after he'd been in there for a

suspiciously long time. He woke up surrounded by 10 cops and firefighters.

At 21, Garbarini was imprisoned for nine months on a felony assault charge after a fight with a dealer. "I wanted to change my life but didn't know how to do it," he said.

He turned a corner at 28, when he was living in a house in Patchogue and using coke, crack and Xanax. He hadn't paid his rent in five months. A friend helped him check into a South Carolina treatment facility.

"They gave me the tools to stay sober and something changed in my heart," he said. "I didn't look at myself or the world in the same way. I had a really negative view of the world and a lot of self-hatred. The world seemed like a nasty and evil place. That changed."

Garbarini, who eventually earned his GED, says he's no longer tempted by drugs.

"Before, when someone offered me something, my first reaction was, 'I want it and I'm going to take it,'" he said. "Now, when I see somebody who is doing drugs, my first reaction is, 'Oh my God, this person needs help.'"

DATE HE STOPPED USING DRUGS: June 27, 2014

HALEY DEROSA, 20, Huntington

DeRosa is trying to finish high school and aspires to work in child development/ psychology.

She said her drinking and drug use mirrored that of her friends back in her early high school days.

Soon, though, she eclipsed them as she gravitated to an even riskier crowd — and eventually became hooked on Xanax.

"My drug use started taking such a toll on my identity and my mood," she said. "My friend group totally changed."

DeRosa can't pinpoint exactly what led to her dependency but said she was sexually molested at age 7, which, she said, "explains why I grew up so fast."

At 16, she broke up with a boyfriend of three and a half years and felt completely lost.

"I didn't know what to do with myself," she said. "At that point, all of my friends had graduated high school."

DeRosa said she started snorting heroin to cope with the loss and was shooting up within a week. She entered a residential drug treatment center on Long Island and stayed for 10 months. DeRosa was

clean the entire time, she said, but started using three weeks after her release. She was 17.

"When I got out, I wasn't able to apply all of the skills I had learned there and I picked back up," she said.

DeRosa returned to high school and managed her addiction for three months before she began using yet again. She overdosed in March 2014 while at home in her bedroom.

"My dad heard me from the lower level gasping for air," she said. "I only used one bag. I drank a few hours before and had taken a little bit of Xanax. They called the cops. My mom and my sister had to give me CPR."

The police, she said, gave her Narcan.

"I was astonished to wake up to my entire family with tears in their eyes and EMTs and cops in my room," she said.

DeRosa was briefly hospitalized and went back to treatment for two months.

When she got out, she relapsed again.

In October 2014, she was arrested for forging a check: It was her

parents who turned her in.

"I wouldn't be alive today without my parents and my family," she said. "I went to jail for 21 days and then went on drug court."

What followed was more treatment, more periods of sobriety, more promises and false starts.

Her parents, fearful she'd die, told her she could no longer live with them. They sent her to a Florida treatment center and then a halfway house in West Palm Beach, she said. DeRosa stayed clean for six months but relapsed in July 2015.

The cycle repeated itself during the following year. DeRosa said she's been revived by Narcan six times, with the last incident occurring in early last month.

Though she's pledged to stop using before, this time feels different, she says.

"I am wholeheartedly desperate," she said. "This is the first time in my life that I feel as grounded as I do. I know my heart is in the right place, but that is going to take time."

DATE SHE STOPPED USING DRUGS: June 16, 2016



DANIELLE FINKELSTEIN