

Yale University
School of Medicine
Yale-New Haven Hospital

AIDS PROGRAM

Mary R. Walton, MHS, PA-C

Clinical Coordinator

135 College Street, Suite 323

New Haven, Connecticut 06510-2483

Telephone: (203) 494-5005 Fax: (203) 737-4051

E-mail address: mary.walton@yale.edu

March 6, 2012

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, members of the committee:

I very much appreciate the opportunity to testify in favor of Bill 5063, An Act Concerning Immunity for Treatment of Drug Overdose with Opioid Antagonist.

My name is Mary Walton. I am a Physician Assistant and have worked at the Yale AIDS Program for over 10 years. In addition, I worked in an HIV clinic in Florida in the 1980's. During my time at Yale, I ran a mobile health care clinic (the Community Health Care Van) that provided free care to the most marginalized populations in New Haven. Currently, I work at two drug treatment centers in New Haven.

More than 2,200 people have died in Connecticut from opioid overdoses in the past 11 years—an average of more than one every other day, according to a survey of state medical records by the Yale School of Public Health. These study results show that this is a widespread problem not limited to inner cities as only 22 of Connecticut's 169 towns did not report overdose death as of 2009. Most overdose deaths in the United States are now attributed to prescription opioid painkillers such as oxycodone. Many people who initially become addicted to oxycodone cannot afford it, and then switch to heroin.

I have worked to train drug users in overdose prevention using Narcan. During these trainings, I heard many stories of how individuals have watched friends and loved ones die of overdose when the ambulance came too late. I also heard uplifting stories of how Narcan in overdose prevention kits has saved lives as well. IT WORKS!

Whether you agree with Narcan as a means of overdose prevention, or whether you find it difficult to understand addiction, I want to point out an important statement: the American Society of Addiction Medicine issued a new definition of Addiction in 2011, defining it as a primary, **chronic** disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. Like other chronic diseases, addiction often involves cycles of relapse and remission.

The problem of addiction is not something that will go away overnight or easily—especially with the continued prescription of oxycodone, particularly by prescribers who are uneducated in dependence and addiction, and irresponsibly prescribing it. Until we as healthcare and mental health care providers, drug treatment and social care workers, and those who care, can help reduce drug addiction, Narcan can save lives!

Please support Bill 5063 so that we can save more lives. Thank you--



Mary Walton, PA-C