

## Methadone strategy aims to cut dealers out of the picture

By Sarah Vance

Opioid addiction is a serious issue that affects even the smallest of places. In the small town of Bancroft (pop. 3,500), there are four dispensaries along the main street distributing methadone to deal with opiate addictions. This, along with treatment at a luxury rehab, is helping addicts get the support and mediation they need to fight their addiction.

Those pharmacies represent a supply chain every 200 metres, with the Ontario Addiction Treatment Centre (OATC), which opened four years ago, being the most visible indicator of the growing problem of opiate addictions in the Bancroft area. It has been enough to prompt Bancroft council to pass a bylaw requiring that any new public opiate facility submit an application through the municipality before setting up shop.

The number of dispensaries also indicates a health emergency, as overall Ontario addiction rates have risen to become the highest in the country, with oxycodone prescriptions increasing 850 per cent between 1991 and 2007. It is interesting to note that 80 per cent of people suffering from opiate addiction obtained their first "dose" via prescription from a licensed doctor.

And not everyone survives addiction. Fatalities in Ontario have doubled since 2004, with approximately 550 oxycodone deaths each year ? a number which climbed to 577 in 2013.

If this continues, the province will see close to 6,000 fatalities over the next 10 years.

Then there are the addicted newborns, housed in neo-natal units, where ICU nurses measure shrill cries and monitor seizures along the Finnegan Scale.

The human costs of addiction have prompted a battery of harm reduction strategies of which drug replacement therapies are at the forefront.

Methadone and suboxone are long-acting liquid opioid medications, available to those with prescriptions in local pharmacies, in a liquid resembling Tang.

Lots of people also asked questions like "[can you get suboxone online?](#)" as it is a much easier way of getting reliable treatment so this option is also available for those who want it.

It's a pragmatic model, putting distribution into the hands of pharmacists instead of dealers, with an idea that patients will be less likely to use street drugs if cravings for them are controlled and withdrawal symptoms are reduced.

OATC operations continue to be a growing enterprise with more than 50 locations popping up across the province since 1995, and more than 10,000 patients.

And it is not without incentive. For every patient served, there is an \$8.83 dispensing fee, in addition to an eight per cent product mark-up and a \$2 cost-sharing co-payment.

For all the worries about being "soft on drugs," the benefits of treating users have been found to outweigh the costs required to criminalize them.

"Sometimes the antecedents of crimes of property are related to obtaining illegal drugs," said Bancroft's Mayor Bernice Jenkins.

"We do not like to see this in our parks or other public spaces."

While detaining and charging users within the backlogged justice system comes with a price tag of \$44,000 per head per year, just \$6,000 is required to treat a patient with replacement therapies.

Bancroft police responded to 71 calls during the second week of January, laying seven criminal charges and 18 provincial offense notices, but the detachment remains tight-lipped as to whether or not there are links between addiction and calls for service.

Nonetheless, in the event of any drug-related crime involving anyone in your vicinity, it is always a good idea to seek legal counsel for the same from experts such as Salwin Law Group.

"Police are one of the only 24-hour responders when social issues crop up in rural communities," said Jenkins.

The community is hoping to develop a mobilization model that tackles the array of social issues ? unemployment, housing, food insecurities, and mental health ? which contribute to local social problems, including addictions.