

THE PLAIN DEALER

February 21, 2011

Gov. John Kasich announces help for county ravaged by prescription drug abuse

By Aaron Marshall

COLUMBUS, Ohio - A Southern Ohio county ravaged by prescription drug abuse problems will be getting some special help courtesy of Gov. John Kasich.

The Republican governor announced the initiatives Monday in Scioto County, which he called "ground zero" in the battle against unintentional drug overdoses, which since 2007 have become the leading cause of accidental death in Ohio.

"Last year 9.7 million doses of prescription painkillers were dispensed in Scioto County--123 doses for every man, woman and child in the county," said a news release from Kasich's office.

The governor, who met with local law enforcement and drug treatment officials, as well as relatives of overdose victims, announced these steps:

- \$100,000 for a private, non-profit drug treatment center in Portsmouth that already treats about 1,500 people a year. The money could be matched by \$300,000 in federal funds, and used to bring more people into treatment.
- A new prescription drug addiction task force, to be advised by former Ohio Attorney General Betty Montgomery.
- An executive order from Kasich allowing state treatment providers to use FDA-approved drugs that can help in the treatment of opiate addiction.

Kasich also supports legislation current undergoing Ohio House committee hearings that would make it more difficult for unscrupulous pain clinics to do business. Scioto County currently has about a half-dozen pain clinics operating in the county of 75,000 drawing customers from across Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky.

###

The New York Times

April 19, 2011

Ohio County Losing Its Young to Painkillers' Grip

By Sabrina Tavernise

PORTSMOUTH, Ohio — This industrial town was once known for its shoes and its steel. But after decades of decline it has made a name for itself for a different reason: it is home to some of the highest rates of prescription drug overdoses in the state, and growing numbers of younger victims.

Their pictures hang in the front window of an empty department store, a makeshift memorial to more than two dozen lives. The youngest was still in high school.

Nearly 1 in 10 babies born last year in this Appalachian county tested positive for drugs. In January, police caught several junior high school students, including a seventh grader, with painkillers. Stepping Stone House, a residential rehabilitation clinic for women, takes patients as young as 18.

In Ohio, fatal overdoses more than quadrupled in the last decade, and by 2007 had surpassed car crashes as the leading cause of accidental death, according to the Department of Health.

The problem is so severe that Gov. John R. Kasich announced \$36 million in new spending on it this month, an unusual step in this era of budget austerity. And on Tuesday, the Obama administration announced plans to fight prescription drug addiction nationally, noting that it was now killing more people than crack cocaine in the 1980s and heroin in the 1970s combined.

The pattern playing out here bears an eerie resemblance to some blighted cities of the 1980s: a generation of young people who were raised by their grandparents because their parents were addicts, and now they are addicts themselves.

"We're raising third and fourth generations of prescription drug abusers now," said Chief Charles Horner of the Portsmouth police, who often notes that more people died from overdoses in Ohio in 2008 and 2009 than in the World Trade Center attack in 2001.

"We should all be outraged," Chief Horner said. "It should be a No. 1 priority."

Scioto County (pronounced sy-OH-tuh), of which Portsmouth is the seat, has made it one, bringing what had been a very private problem out into the public.

A coroner and a pharmacist are among its state lawmakers, and a bill in the state legislature would more strictly regulate pain clinics where drugs are dispensed. The most popular drug among addicts here is the painkiller OxyContin.

The county's efforts got the attention of political leaders in the state, including Governor Kasich, who declared the county a pilot project for combating addiction.

The problem is so bad that a storage company with business in the county recently complained to Chief Horner that it was having trouble finding enough job candidates who could pass drug tests.

"Around here, everyone has a kid who's addicted," said Lisa Roberts, a nurse who works for the Portsmouth Health Department. "It doesn't matter if you're a police chief, a judge or a Baptist preacher. It's kind of like a rite of passage."

About 10 years ago, when OxyContin first hurtled through the pretty hollow just north of town where the Mannering family lives, the two youngest children were still in high school. Their parents tried to protect them, pleading with neighbors who were selling the drug to stop. By mid-decade, they counted 11 houses on their country road that were dealing the drug (including a woman in her 70s called Granny), and their two youngest children, Nina and Chad, were addicted.

[CONTINUED – New York Times: “Ohio county losing its young to painkillers’ grip”]

A vast majority of young people, officials said, get the drugs indirectly from dealers and other users who have access to prescriptions. Nina and Chad’s father, Ed Mannering, said he caught a 74-year-old friend selling the pills from his front door. The sales were a supplement, the man said sheepishly, to his Social Security check.

“You drive down the road here, and you think, ‘All these nice houses, no one’s doing any of that stuff,’ ” said Judy Mannering, Nina and Chad’s mother. “But they are. Oh, they are.”

Nina Mannering tried to quit, her mother said. She had a small daughter to care for. She was in a counseling program for a few months, but was told to leave when her boyfriend brought her pills. At one point, Ms. Mannering counted the number of schoolmates in four graduating classes who had died from overdoses, her mother recalled. The total was 16.

“It’s like being in the middle of a tornado,” said Ed Hughes, director of the Counseling Center, a network of rehabilitation and drug counseling clinics in the county. “It was moving so fast that families were caught totally off guard. They had no idea what they were dealing with.”

In January 2010, Ms. Mannering was killed less than a mile from her parents’ house. A man broke into the house where she was staying with a 65-year-old veteran who had access to prescriptions, and shot them both, looking for pills, the police said. She was 29. Her daughter, who was 8 at the time, watched.

“It was like your worst fear that could ever come true,” said Judy Mannering, who discovered her daughter’s body at dusk, bathed in the light of a flickering, soundless television. Her son, Chad, served three years in prison for robbery. He is now sober.

Families are joining forces to combat the problem. Mothers whose children died from addiction have started to picket clinics that they believed were reckless with prescriptions. Last month the City Council passed a moratorium on new clinics.

“If you look at the problem, it’s the darkest most malevolent thing you’ve ever seen,” said Terry Johnson, a former Portsmouth coroner who is now a state assemblyman. “But right now, people are feeling like they are making a difference, and that’s the most important thing. We need to capture that spirit.”

The authorities have had some successes. Last month, agents raided a doctor’s office and revoked his license. Another doctor from the area, Paul Volkman, is on trial in federal court in Cincinnati and accused of illegally disbursing prescription painkillers. But the drugs are legal, and it is hard to prosecute the people selling them. There are still five clinics in the county, several of them run by felons, officials said.

Chief Horner believes the problem will continue to fester without a coordinated effort by local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

The state is stepping up efforts with prevention and rehabilitation, a spokeswoman for Governor Kasich said, but there are no plans to increase local financing for law enforcement, which remains, in the view of Chief Horner, woefully inadequate.

The trial of the man who shot Nina Mannering begins in June. Her mother awaits it with a mixture of dread and anticipation. For a while Judy Mannering felt so suffocated by grief that she could not leave the house, but that has passed.

Her grandchildren keep her going, as does her husband, Ed, a logger, who at 59 is still working full time, having spent their entire retirement savings on legal fees and rehab programs.

Mrs. Mannering has joined a group of other grieving mothers, who made the memorial of photographs in the store window. She has protested with them, holding up a sign with her daughter’s photograph outside a clinic that dispenses pills. It was something she had never done before, but the ache of her loss gave her the courage.

“I miss her so much,” she said of Nina. “If you had 100 kids, you’ll never replace the one you’ve lost.”

###

THE PLAIN DEALER

May 20, 2011

Ohio Gov. John Kasich signs bill cracking down on dangerous pill mills

By Reginald Fields

COLUMBUS, Ohio - The handful of doctors in tiny Scioto County in Southern Ohio last year prescribed more than 9.7 million pills for a population of just 79,000 people.

That's about 122 pills per man, woman and child in the border county across the Ohio River from Kentucky and nearby West Virginia that has earned a national reputation for prescription abuse and an unusually high number of overdose deaths due to the drugs.

"I think that kinda tells the story," said a solemn Republican Gov. John Kasich at a news conference.

Kasich on Friday signed House Bill 93, which is aimed at cracking down on pain management clinics and punishing doctors who over-prescribe.

Kasich said he first noticed the problem in Scioto County last year while on the campaign trail. He made the issue one of his top priorities when he took office in January. The problem in Scioto County has been reported in The Plain Dealer and since then in the New York Times and in a documentary from A&E cable television.

Kasich signed the bill at an event at a Highway Patrol training facility in Columbus with family members of Scioto County overdose victims watching. Next to Kasich was a table filled with bags of green and white opiates and designer pills, like Ecstasy, seized by state troopers.

"The time for talk has ended and the time for action has begun," said state Rep. Dave Burke, a Marion Republican who co-sponsored the bill with state Rep. Terry Johnson. Johnson is a Republican who until last year was Scioto County's coroner and saw first-hand the carnage inflicted by addiction to OxyContin and other pain pills.

Law enforcement officers and prosecutors said this bill now frees them to more actively pursue the doctors who too frequently distribute the narcotics.

"We will see more indictments, we will see more arrests, we will see more prosecutions and we will see more convictions," said Aaron Haslam, coordinator of the prescription drug abuse initiative at the Ohio Attorney General's Office.

The bill cleared the General Assembly and was sent to the governor on Tuesday, the same day the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration suspended the licenses of four doctors and a pharmacy in Scioto County to distribute opiate pain killers and other controlled substances. The Ohio attorney general's office assisted with raids at offices of those doctors and is working with federal authorities on the continuing investigation.

"We're building a house and this is the nail gun," Haslam said, referring to House Bill 93. "It's a big tool. But it's not the end."

###

Portsmouth Daily Times

February 8, 2012

SOLACE's Krohn awarded Courage Medal

By Wayne Allen

During Gov. John Kasich's State of the State address Tuesday he award one of three Governor's Courage Medals to Jo Anna Krohn, founder of SOLACE.

"This is the greatest honor I've gotten in my life. This is not just my medal, it belongs to my son, Wesley, and it belongs to SOLACE and all of their lost loved ones," Krohn said. "I heard from a lot of people there that thanked us for what we started in our county. They said we've changed everything in Ohio; that's pretty awesome."

During his speech, Kasich told Krohn's story.

"Joanna had a son who was a senior in high school. He lost his life because of prescription drugs. As a result she formed a group called SOLACE (Surviving Our Loss And Continuing Everyday)," Kasich said. "I remember coming up before I was going to be sworn in and the SOLACE ladies were there in their pink shirts and they made me cry, because they said, 'We want you to help us.' Joanna Krohn could have faded away, but she stood up and made a purpose of what she and SOLACE needed to do."

Other metal recipients included Theresa Flores, a victim of human trafficking, a teenage Theresa Flores was exploited, blackmailed, and abused. Today she is director of Education & Training for Gracehaven House in Dublin, a faith-based care and rehabilitation home for girls who have been victimized by human trafficking.

The third medal was awarded posthumously to U.S. Army Specialist Jesse Snow. In November 2010, Snow served in Afghanistan as a radio telephone operator assigned to the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division. With his unit under attack, Snow crawled through enemy fire to help his fellow soldiers. After his weapon was destroyed, Snow secured ammunition, performed first aid, and even used his own body to shield a fellow soldier from machine gun fire. He later died from his wounds.

According to Kasich's Communications office, the front of the medal shows a flame representing the spirit of courage above the shape of Ohio. Above are the words "For Courage" and below is the word "Ohio." On the back is the recipient's name engraved with the year of presentation.

###

Portsmouth Daily Times

February 24, 2012

Opiate numbers drop dramatically in Scioto

By Wayne Allen

Preliminary projections from the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS), based on OARRS data, show that nearly 1.5 million fewer opiates were dispensed in Scioto County in 2011.

According to ODADAS, in 2010 there were 9,713,494 opiates dispensed in Scioto County. The preliminary data shows that in 2011 there were 8,234,516, which represents a decrease of 1,478,978 or 20 percent.

"We were pleasantly surprised with the degree of change that we saw in Scioto County. It's the biggest change in the state with no one even close. Scioto County saw a 20 percent drop, the next closest was 10 percent," ODADAS Director Orman Hall said.

For the first time in more than a decade drug deaths in Scioto County have decreased. According to Scioto County Coroner Dr. Darren Adams' office, in 2011 there were 20 deaths directly related to drugs and 11 deaths attributed as drug-related deaths. In 2010, there were 24 deaths directly related to drugs and 19 deaths that were drug-related.

"The rate of drug-related deaths have climbed steadily over the last 10 years. This is the first time we've seen that number decline since we started keeping track in 2001," said Lisa Roberts, public health nurse with the Portsmouth City Health Department. "We know this number has declined because of our efforts and the community's efforts to interfere with illegal distribution of pain pills. It's also the result of a lot of community education. It was a wonderful year of the community coming together."

Hall also attributed some of the success to the passage of House Bill 93, which led to the regulation of pain clinics throughout the state.

"What this shows is that when there is a concerted effort in a community we can make a difference. Scioto County has demonstrated that a difference can be made. There is a lot more that we need to do statewide and there is a lot more that we need to do in Scioto County. The biggest reduction in our state in the number of dispensed pills in 2011 was in Scioto County. That, I believe, is because of all of the hard work and all of the attention that advocates in Scioto County have brought to bear on this problem," Hall said.

###

Portsmouth Daily Times

February 26, 2012

Anti-overdose program to begin April 1

By Wayne Allen

Scioto County has been chosen by the Ohio Department of Health to be Ohio's first Community-Based Naloxone Overdose Reversal Project. The program is funded with \$40,000 in seed money from the ODH with the Portsmouth City Health Department administering.

The Health Department has established program guidelines.

According to promotional material, participants of the program will be trained to recognize the signs and symptoms of overdose and able to distinguish between types of overdoses. Participants will also learn how to properly administer Naloxone.

According to the Federal Drug Administration, Naloxone is a synthetic drug, similar to morphine, that blocks opiate receptors in the nervous system.

The program is set to begin April 1 in Portsmouth, public health nurse Lisa Roberts said.

"This is a good thing for Scioto County because we get to be the leader and set the stage for what the rest of the state does," Roberts said. "We were asked to do this and they (ODH officials) will be providing funding. We will be setting the stage and establishing a program that has the potential to be replicated throughout the state," Roberts said.

She said the Health Department will be working with the State Medical Board of Ohio to establish policies and procedures for the program.

Roberts said the Portsmouth Health Department got to name the program, since it was the first site. It is being named after Leslie Dawn Cooper, the daughter of Barbara Howard. Cooper lost her life to prescription drug overdose.

The program will be called "Rise at DAWN — Deaths Avoided With Naloxone."

According to program material, "Project DAWN will build capacity at the Portsmouth City Health Department by complementing three existing programs the 'Prescription for Community Recovery' overdose prevention program and the 'Prevention Not Permission' syringe exchange program. Project DAWN will be sustained beyond the initial funding period through integration with existing harm reduction services."

###

February 26, 2012

State troopers put new emphasis on nabbing drug traffickers

By Randy Ludlow

LANCASTER, Ohio — As Trooper Mike Wilson's cruiser idles in the median of the Rt. 33 bypass, most motorists figure he's lying in wait for speeders.

They're partly right. Traffic violations provide a reason for troopers to toggle on the flashing blue lights and pull over offenders.

But Wilson is searching for speed of a different sort — drugs — along what he describes as “Heroin Highway,” the stretch of Rt. 33 between Columbus and southeastern Ohio.

It's a popular route for dealers and users seeking a cheaper and easier-to-find substitute for pills — heroin. The opiate is plentiful on the streets of Columbus as painkillers increase in price and scarcity amid the crackdown on “pill mills” — physician offices and clinics whose main business is cranking out prescriptions as quickly as possible.

Wilson and other troopers working special patrols around Ohio never have been more successful in intercepting narcotics. “Now, it's more than, ‘Just go write speeding tickets.’ We're making a difference out there,” he said.

By liberating troopers from their ticket books, the drug-interdiction business is booming for the State Highway Patrol as it focuses more manpower on drugs and other crimes through an initiative dubbed “Trooper Shield.”

Traffic safety and enforcement — nabbing dangerous and drunken drivers and reducing traffic fatalities — remain a priority, but “criminal patrol” now ranks as a co-equal.

The patrol has converted “traffic robots chasing taillights” into troopers taught to use traffic stops as gateways to detecting other crimes, said Lt. Col. Paul Pride, the assistant superintendent directing the transformation.

Ohio's 1,493 uniformed troopers have been instructed to “slow down” and read the subtleties of the situation, looking for driving behavior, body language and inconsistencies that might signal other crimes, Pride said.

The first year's results: The amount of cocaine seized on Ohio's roads increased 663 percent in 2011. Heroin seizures were up 69 percent. The number of illicit painkillers taken off the street rose by 39 percent.

The trend is continuing. Less than two months into the new year, the number of narcotics arrests and citations and felony arrests is one-third ahead of a year ago.

For floating troopers such as Wilson, it is experience, embellished with gut instinct, that leads him to jam his cruiser into gear and race after vehicles that triggered both his speed detector and drug-detecting senses.

The 29-year-old, who works from the Granville post east of Columbus, is accomplished at picking off drug runners and buyers. Wilson made a trooper-record 96 felony arrests in 2010, and all but a few involved drugs.

On a recent weekday, Wilson pulled over a rented white Jeep Compass, ferrying a couple home to Roanoke, Va., for speeding at 72 mph when he spotted the driver apparently attempt to hide from view by reclining in his seat.

The driver smelled of marijuana, and his wife was brushing marijuana residue from her pants when Wilson walked up to the SUV. He quickly found a giant “blunt” joint, but nothing else illegal amid a packed vehicle that appeared to have made an expensive dent in the merchandise at Easton Town Center. A field-sobriety test and tickets, and the pair were on their way.

[CONTINUED – Columbus Dispatch: “State troopers put new emphasis on nabbing drug traffickers”]

About the same time, Trooper Travis Woodyard, accompanied by his canine partner Miki, pulled over a mud-splattered old green Plymouth Breeze for an obscured rear license plate.

The southern Ohio men were headed home after a trip to Columbus retailers in which they had acquired illegal bath salts (\$149 an ounce), cocaine-cutting supplies and equipment and supplies used to cultivate marijuana indoors.

Woodyard worked the phone in hopes that local police could secure warrants to search the suspects’ homes for a secret garden. The patrol has worked to track drugs beyond the “mules” and “reach out and tap someone else,” Pride said.

An increasing number of partnerships with drug task forces and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration are providing intelligence about drug couriers traversing Ohio, which he called a “crossroads for drugs” headed elsewhere.

Later in the day, Wilson pulled over an aged white Nissan Sentra for a muffler violation. Something about the young man from Athens and two female passengers struck him as worthy of attention.

The trail of needle tracks on the man’s arms showed he was an intravenous drug user. He said they were scars from woodworking before confessing to Wilson’s finding. But on this day, the man and his car were clean, and he was sent on his way.

Wilson, by his standards, had an off day with no felony arrests. But a day at a time, a stop at a time, in busts big and small, “we’re removing bad guys from our roadways and making our communities safer,” Pride said.

The lieutenant colonel said Ohio is gaining a national reputation among drug runners, some of whom now travel around the state to deliver their wares and find ever-more-ingenuous ways of protecting their caches from drug-sniffing dogs.

Wilson, for example, has found a wrapped 13-pound bundle of marijuana floating in a sea of Febreze in a sealed container and bags of drugs surrounded by a thick coat of pepper and then vacuum-packed.

Major drug shipments can include a caravan of three vehicles. A “scout” car, looking for troopers so it can relay warnings, takes the lead ahead of the vehicle carrying the mother lode of drugs. A trailing vehicle, a “blocker,” can impede a pursuing trooper by pulling alongside a tractor-trailer and running the same speed in hopes the drug car makes its getaway.

“We’re forcing them to change their game, and we have to change with them,” Pride said of drug runners’ changing tactics.

Trooper Terri Mikesh, an 18-year veteran who handles canine Marco from the Jackson post, steadily has picked off drugs in a region of southern Ohio that gained national notoriety for the supply and abuse of prescription painkillers.

She has seen a change in supply, though, and credits a coordinated state effort aimed at pinching off the illegal flow of oxycodone and similar pills.

“If you had asked me about the drug flow a year ago, my answer would be pills, pills and more pills, opiate-based painkillers,” she said. “We’re still seeing pills, but now there’s more cocaine, crack, heroin, methamphetamines.”

Although major busts by the State Highway Patrol, such as last year’s separate seizures of 17 pounds of heroin (nearly 20,000 doses) and 871 pounds of marijuana, make headlines, Mikesh finds value in the daily grind.

“They may only be user amounts, but every bit we can get off the road makes a significant difference,” she said. “To us, anything we can get off the road and out of the hands of someone in the community makes a difference.”

###

April 1, 2012

Death toll drops in drug war

By Pat Holmes and Deanna Pan

Gov. John Kasich draws applause in February after signing an emergency order to expand treatment options for addicts and fight drug abuse.

After a decade of shattered lives and early graves, Ohioans finally might be seeing a glimmer of hope in the battle against prescription-drug overdoses.

Drug-induced deaths inched downward last year for the first time in 10 years. Four fewer people fatally overdosed in 2011 than in 2010.

Between 2010 and 2012, Ohio's average per-capita dose of prescription opiates decreased by 0.8 percent, according to the Ohio State Board of Pharmacy. While the statewide decline is small, more than half of Ohio's counties saw a reduction — including virtually all of southern Ohio, considered the heart of the problem.

In Scioto County, the number of pills prescribed dropped by more than 15 percent. The two counties just up the Ohio River, Lawrence and Gallia, also recorded double-digit decreases, while Pike and Jackson counties to the north showed just under a 10 percent decline.

The Scioto County total translates into 1.5 million fewer pills prescribed last year than in 2010. And, more important, the persistent correlation between the number of pills handed out and the number of drug-related deaths held true: 17 fewer people lost their lives in Scioto County.

Credit for the possible turnaround is multifaceted: a concentrated effort to close "pill mills" that dispensed prescriptions or drugs in large quantities, a new state law cracking down on pain clinics, an active public-private education campaign and doctors' newfound awareness about the dangers of overprescribing addictive painkillers.

But no one is holding a victory celebration just yet in this drug epidemic.

"It's its own animal," said Lisa Roberts, a public-health nurse at the Portsmouth Health Department in Scioto County. "It's entrenched in rural communities to the point ... that some people call the police and tell them they've been shortchanged on pill deals."

More alarming: Those who can't get prescription drugs because of the state's new crackdown are turning to lethal alternatives such as heroin.

What the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services calls heroin hot spots are cropping up not only in larger cities such as Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton, Akron and Cincinnati, but also in more rural areas, such as Highland County in southwestern Ohio and Fairfield County just southeast of Columbus.

The death toll from accidental drug overdoses in Ohio had risen steadily since 1999, reaching a record high in 2010 of more than 1,500 deaths, according to the latest data from the state Department of Health.

Of those 1,500 deaths, 45 percent involved prescription opiates, such as Oxycontin, Vicodin and methadone, a synthetic drug commonly used to help heroin addicts through withdrawal.

One difficult aspect of the pill battle is that no single factor created the drug problem plaguing Ohio, which means that a solution must be multipronged, too. Authorities cite four factors, some of which can't be controlled:

Ohio is a geographic crossroads of highways and interstates that serve as major trafficking routes. A new emphasis on detection by the State Highway Patrol led to a 13 percent increase in drug seizures last year, compared with the previous three-year average. A total of 51,723 prescription pills were seized, an increase of more than 10,000 from 2010.

[CONTINUED – Columbus Dispatch: “Death toll drops in drug war”]

“Florida is beginning to work with us, as well as other states, to share information,” said Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine. “We’ve made this a priority to go after this prescription-drug problem.”

Persistent unemployment and high poverty rates, especially in Ohio’s rural areas, lead to drug trafficking and abuse.

“If they’re poor and they don’t really go to school anymore and they don’t have jobs, they hang out on the streets,” said Dr. Robert Masone, president and executive director of the Ohio Society of Interventional Pain Physicians. “And the people that have these pills, they sell these pills and they can get high. That’s what they do almost every day.”

Gov. John Kasich says that’s one reason he is emphasizing jobs: “What we find is, when people don’t have work, when they become hopeless, they turn to things they otherwise wouldn’t turn to.”

Though the drug scourge has been around since the late 1990s, the first legislation to combat prescription-drug abuse didn’t come until 2011.

“The technical issue was, what (pill-mill physicians) were doing was actually legal,” said state Sen. Dave Burke, R-Marysville, a pharmacist who sponsored last year’s pill-mill bill. “How do you stop that?”

The wheels began turning with a task force set up under Gov. Ted Strickland, Burke said.

“The drug task force doesn’t get the credit it deserves ... only it didn’t solve the problem of the pain clinic,” he said. “If (the authors of the pill-mill bill) are the lead singers, Strickland’s drug task force was the band.”

Treating pain with opiates is a relatively new practice, and the necessary patient-to-doctor communication has been skewed by heavy pharmaceutical advertising and other factors over the past decade.

Orman Hall, director of the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services, tells of a staff member taking his son for treatment of a sore throat. He received a prescription for medicine to treat his throat *and* one for an opiate painkiller.

Treating pain with opiates became the norm in the late 1990s, Hall said. This not only increased the dangers of addiction, but also of opiate-induced hyperalgesia, or an increased sensitivity to pain.

That switch in the 1990s was sparked by a surge in direct-to-consumer prescription advertising. Pharmaceutical companies’ ad spending more than quadrupled from 1995 to 2000, when about \$22.5 million was spent, he said.

This marketing effort led to patients seeking certain drugs from their doctors.

“We started down this path where patients joined up with the (pharmaceutical company). That matured significantly in the 2000-to-2010 window, where people developed arts of deception realizing physicians would do as you asked them to do because they’re just trying to help people,” Burke said.

“And until you know you’ve been deceived, you don’t know you’re being deceived. ... The physician and the pharmacists no longer acted in collaboration.”

With the dangerously addictive properties in these medications, a need for more open communication between doctors and their patients should have become obvious sooner, added Richard Whitehouse, executive director of the Ohio State Medical Board.

“Despite whatever background or experience, folks may still not appreciate the addictive properties of these medications,” he said.

Kasich said the next step for Ohio should include redefining the treatment of pain.

“Long term, we’re going to need the medical schools to begin to instruct physicians about the way to use these highly addictive drugs,” Kasich said.

Burke agrees.

“If we’re going to treat this as a disease, then we need to treat it as a disease,” he said. “We’ve got to legitimize the art of pain treatment and management.”

###

April 22, 2012

Task force brings SOLACE to Stark

By Lisa Reicosky

Jo Anna Krohn is on a mission to prevent parents from experiencing her loss.

In 2008, Krohn's son, Wesley Workman, died of an accidental gunshot while he was under the influence of alcohol, marijuana and opiates. Krohn, a resident of Ohio's Scioto County, often referred to as "Pharmageddon," said she has witnessed widespread opiate addiction and works with law enforcement to close "pill mills."

Stark County is in Krohn's sites as she brings her organization, SOLACE, here Thursday to Heartland Behavior Healthcare in Massillon for an organizational workshop.

SOLACE — Surviving Our Loss And Continuing Everyday — is a support/action group that hopes to make a difference in the realm of drug addiction by establishing chapters statewide.

It was a goal of the recently formed Stark County Opiate Task Force to bring SOLACE here.

The meeting, sponsored by the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Stark County, in conjunction with the Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addictions Services and the Drug Free Action Alliance, will be a chance for people from recovery, treatment, healthcare, schools, Access to Recovery (ATR) programs, community organizations, and any concerned citizens to become part of the solution in drug addiction and abuse, Krohn said.

"By sharing my son's tragic story and advocating for change, I can find my personal solace. By reaching out to others, I am healing and learning how to continue with my life," Krohn said. "I believe that I have been called upon by something larger than myself and my purpose is to carry Wesley's message to help save others. A community can affect their own change."

One of SOLACE's greatest contributions to the fight against addiction, Krohn said in an interview with the Portsmouth Times, has been the way they've inspired people to speak out.

"A lot of people in the group said they were ashamed their child died because of drugs. They thought it was something shameful that they didn't want people to know," Krohn said. "But then, just to come to the group and listen to everybody, it was like a freedom for them."

Krohn was honored by Gov. John Kasich in February with a medal of courage during his State of the State address in Steubenville.

She serves as one of the faces of Kasich's anti-prescription drug campaign, "Don't Get Me Started," which is a statewide multimedia campaign dealing with the growing epidemic of opiate drug addiction.

Paula Mastroianni of the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Stark County is excited to have the newest chapter here.

"The introduction of SOLACE is one of the most important steps we can take for our community to combat the life-altering effects of opiate addiction. Their name says it all...they bring solace to those in pain," she said.

###