

## Community discusses opioid crisis in Calvert

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**Prince Frederick, MD** - The ongoing opioid epidemic poses some frightening realities for society. For one, the National Safety Council reports accidental opioid overdose has eclipsed motor vehicle crashes as a cause of death. Drug overdoses are now the leading cause of death among Americans under 50. Additionally, the deadly drug heroin now has new companions in the pipeline in fentanyl and the extremely lethal carfentanyl. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that less than half the 2.2 million people who need treatment for opioid addiction are receiving it.

On Saturday, Feb. 23, Calvert Library Prince Frederick hosted a "National Issues Forum," inviting members of the public to participate in a conversation about the ongoing prescription drug crisis.

The two-hour conversation was moderated by Community Mediation Center of Calvert Executive Director Sheri Tardio, PhD. Other participating agencies were Calvert Alliance Against Substance Abuse, Calvert County Behavioral Health Services, the Calvert County Sheriff's Office and Calvert County State's Attorney's Office. At the outset of the discussion, Calvert Library Public Relations Coordinator Robyn Truslow asked members of the media present to refrain from reporting any personal information individuals shared with attendees. In fact, participants included family members and friends of individuals who lost their lives as a result of drug overdoses. There was also an individual in attendance who is in recovery and others who know someone currently struggling with addiction.

Using a National Issues Forum Institute guideline, the discussion was divided in three "options." They were Focus on Treatment for All, Focus on Enforcement and Focus on Individual Choice.

The treatment component, one participant stated, needed to focus on aftercare and helping recovering addicts return to the workforce. Advocacy was voiced for additional "sober living facilities"—group homes for those recovering from addiction. Residents have responsibilities for the home's upkeep and are encouraged to find work or attend school. The participants, by consensus, felt opioid addiction is a scourge no one seeks and is often the result of being prescribed a painkiller. "It's nobody's fault, it just happened," said one participant. It was also stated that addiction treatments need to be less rigid in their process. "One treatment that will work for one may not work for another," said Tardio.

During the portion of the discussion where enforcement was discussed, Calvert State's Attorney Andrew Rappaport (pictured) stated that some people can hide their addiction but the situation changes if they are arrested on drug charges. "Once you come into the court system something has to be done," said Rappaport. The state's attorney praised the Calvert County Circuit Court Drug Court, which helps nonviolent offenders get treatment and guidance in recovering from addictions. He also noted that the local detention center has treatment programs.

Possible actions for helping individuals to choose to get clean included educating families about their options, including "psychiatric directives" if the addict does not seem capable of making the decision for his or herself. Other proposed actions included establishment of a "safe place" for addicts—a controversial option since it enables drug injections and mentorship programs for those in recovery.

A male participant stated, "this isn't the drug problem of 40 years ago. We need a new lens." A female participant stated that public schools needed to re-implement "old school programs" such as "health and home economics."

After the discussion was concluded, Calvert Health Recovery Support Supervisor Megan Sarikaya (pictured, above) gave audience members who stayed an overview of the overdose treatment drug Naloxone, specifically the brand Narcan ®. The medication blocks the effects of opioids, albeit in a time-sensitive manner. Narcan can be administered intravenously or in the form of a nasal spray.

Free training for the administration of Naloxone is available through the county's [Overdose Response Program](#).

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