



Through my office's prevention work, I am constantly meeting and talking with clinicians, other law enforcement officials, experts in the recovery field and, of course, with people who have themselves struggled or whose loved ones have struggled with addiction. At a recent community event, I was made aware of an issue that concerned me both as a law enforcement official and as a pet owner: people misusing pets' pain medications, particularly opioids.

Not long ago, I met a pet owner who said she could not understand why her pet seemed to still be in pain, despite having been prescribed medication. When she realized that a member of her family had been using the pet's medication, it suddenly became clear why the pet had not been getting better.

The misuse of pet medication has serious safety implications - for people and for animals. It is hard to find someone whose life hasn't been affected in some way by the ongoing opioid crisis in our country. We confront this crisis on many fronts and one of our greatest weapons in this fight is information. Educating people about the signs of drug misuse, available treatment resources and how to properly store and dispose of all medications is a crucial part of helping to stem the tide of overdoses and deaths. I am asking you to help me in this fight by conveying this important information to your pets' owners.

Here are a few suggestions to help you identify and address the issue of pet medication misuse in your work:

- **Learn as much as you can about the environment in which your patients and their owners live.**

A pet owner seeking drugs for him or herself may be displaying an irregular pattern of behavior that you may be able to spot. Perhaps he or she is attempting to refill a prescription too soon or insists that he or she is unable to bring the pet by for an exam before needing the prescription refilled. But what can be more difficult to identify is the pet owner who lives with someone who is struggling with addiction and who may be taking a pet's medications. To the extent you are able, try to get some information about who lives in a pet's household. Make note of things that seem unusual. For example, is there a family member who always accompanies the pet owner to appointments?

This is particularly important for your pet owners who are senior citizens. We have found that seniors are at particular risk for having their medications misappropriated and misused. They are also susceptible to theft,

manipulation and coercion. A senior may be reluctant to confide in you if he or she is in a difficult living situation. If you suspect that this is the case, there are resources available. You can view some of them here: <http://middlesexda.com/publications/ProtectingOurElders.pdf>

- **Tell your patients' owners to store pet medications properly and to dispose of pet medications the same way they would dispose of their own unused or unwanted medications.**

Remind owners to store all medications - particularly opioids - in a secure place. Medications should stay in their original, labeled containers and be kept in a place where others cannot get access to them. You should also stress the importance of keeping track of how many doses are administered. In the event that medication does go missing, owners are more likely to notice right away if they have been making note of the doses they have given.

Another way we can combat the opioid crisis is to take unused or unwanted medications out of circulation and off the streets. Proper disposal of medications protects people, animals and the environment. Many cities and towns now provide 24-hour drop boxes in public locations where people can dispose of medications safely. In Middlesex County, my office has used drug forfeiture revenue to provide drop boxes at no cost to 39 of our 54 communities.

These drop boxes are located in the lobbies of police stations in the following cities and towns:

Acton	Holliston	Sherborn
Arlington	Hopkinton	Somerville
Ashland	Hudson	Stoneham
Ayer	Lincoln	Stow
Bedford	Littleton	Sudbury
Belmont	Malden	Townsend
Boxborough	Marlborough	Waltham
Burlington	Maynard	Wakefield
Cambridge	Melrose	Watertown
Carlisle	Newton	Wayland
Concord	North Reading	Weston
Everett	Pepperell	Wilmington
Groton	Reading	Woburn

Familiarize yourself with the locations for safe drug disposal in the community in which you practice and pass this information on to your patients' owners. The DEA maintains a website where you can search for drop boxes in your area:

<https://apps.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/pubdispsearch/spring/main?execution=e>

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- **Identify local law enforcement contacts to whom you can report concerns if a situation arises and develop familiarity with treatment resources in your area.**

We need your help to prevent the misuse of pets' medications. If a concern does arise in your work, you can always bring it to the attention of law enforcement. Local law enforcement has been on the front lines of this crisis and is committed to assisting people who are struggling with addiction in a compassionate way. You can also direct people to local treatment resources. The Massachusetts Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (BSAS) provides an online "helpline" with information on treatment resources in Massachusetts at:

<http://helpline-online.com>

Their telephone helpline is **800-327-5050**

I want to thank the MVMA for inviting me to use this space to discuss this important issue and for being one of our many partners as we continue to confront this public health and safety problem. This crisis is taking a toll on our people and on our animals as well. We need to work together to protect pets - who cannot speak for themselves - and the people who love them. I invite those of you who wish to learn more or who want to get involved and work with my office on this issue to contact Assistant District Attorney Melissa Hartford at (781) 897-8464.

**Marian T. Ryan**  
**District Attorney**  
**Middlesex County**

*Middlesex County District Attorney Marian Ryan represents the Commonwealth's largest county with 54 towns and cities and 26 colleges in urban, suburban, and rural areas, comprising over one quarter of the population of Massachusetts.*

*District Attorney Ryan is recognized for her leadership on the opioid crisis and her innovative programs that address all aspects of abuse and addiction--prosecution, prevention, and treatment. She is a recognized expert on developing and creating innovative solutions that are defined by not simply getting involved after a criminal act has occurred but instead taking meaningful steps to stop crime before it happens.*

*Starting back in 2012, she founded the office's first Opioid Drug Task Force in the Lowell region, and has since developed two additional task forces that serve the eastern portion and the MetroWest region of Middlesex County. In 2015, she launched Project C.A.R.E. a first-of-its-kind public-private partnership to provide immediate services to children who experience opioid-related trauma. She has used drug forfeiture funds, the monies seized through criminal investigations, to fund a variety of prevention and intervention efforts, including: grants for substance free after-prom activities, community drug collection boxes, and donations of Narcan to Middlesex County first responders.*

*District Attorney Ryan and her family are the loving owners of Nellie, a Yorkshire Terrier.*