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PCDOH Launches Opioid Overdose Prevention Program

Brewster, NY— Heroin overdose deaths have risen more than 120 percent in Putnam County over recent years. Thirty-three fatalities occurred in the two-year period of 2012 and 2013, up from 15 in 2010 and 2011. These grim statistics are behind the recent launch of a NYS-approved opioid overdose prevention program by the Putnam County Department of Health (PCDOH). The department joins dozens of other counties in the state adopting this public health intervention that makes use of the antidote drug naloxone, essentially reversing the overdose.

“This epidemic has made a heartbreaking mark on families, friends and our local communities,” says Commissioner of Health Allen Beals, MD, “and we’re responding to County Executive MaryEllen Odell’s call for action in the war on addiction.” The County Executive made this a prime focus in her recent 2015 Putnam County Budget Address, introducing a campaign of education and awareness to combat the problem and challenging all agencies, public and private, to collaborate and address the issue.

Naloxone, which goes under the trade name Narcan®, blocks opioids in the nervous system for 30 to 90 minutes, and provides enough time for transport to an emergency room. The drug will be administered intranasally, (although it is also available as an injectable drug). The

PCDOH is providing the medication free of charge to law enforcement and other first responders once they complete the proper training.

“Of course, this is not a solution to the problem, but it will save lives,” Dr. Beals continues.

Putnam County does not face this drug crisis alone. Drug overdose is a significant issue in the state and in fact the country, prompting NYSDOH legislation that makes it legal for non-medical personnel to administer this prescription medicine to someone to keep an overdose from becoming fatal. The drug has been successfully prescribed and distributed to not only law enforcement, but also directly to heroin users, their families and friends in 15 states and Washington DC. The Harm Reduction Coalition reports that by the end of 2010 over 50,000 kits had been distributed nationwide and over 10,000 overdoses had been reversed, saving that many lives.

Further information on the opioid overdose prevention program is available at:

www.health.ny.gov and search “opioid overdose prevention.”

The Health Department’s mission is to improve and protect the health of the Putnam County community, composed of nearly 100,000 residents. Core services include community health assessment, disease surveillance and control, environmental health protection, family health promotion and health education. For more information, please visit the PCDOH website at www.putnamcountyny.com/health or visit the social media sites on Facebook at www.facebook.com/putnamhealth and Twitter @PutnamHealthNY.

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