

## Searching for a solution to city's heroin problem

■ Nonprofit placed more than 60 young addicts in rehab this year

By Melissa Simon  
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The rampant use of heroin among Simi Valley's youth is no secret, and last week a citywide task force had a special meeting with U.S. Rep. Steve Knight to try and find solutions to the problem.

Knight, who represents the 25th Congressional District's Simi Valley, Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley, called the Nov. 24 meeting with the nine-member Simi Valley Task Force on Heroin Prevention to get a better sense of how the drug problem is affecting the city.

"(Heroin) isn't a problem just here in Simi Valley but across Southern California," the congressman said at the meeting.

"For a long time heroin was seen maybe not as something our kids got into. But those days are way gone and our kids are into heroin, methamphetamine (and other hard drugs)."

Created in 2012, the task force consists of one Chamber of Commerce member and two representatives each from the City Council, Simi Valley Unified School District Board of Education, Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District, and anti-heroin group Not One More.

The task force's primary goal is to help prevent heroin use. Since its creation, the committee has started peer support groups in middle and high schools, provided anti-drug education and called for random police K-9 searches on school campuses.

City Councilmember Mike Judge, who sits on the task force, said during the meeting that the group helps educate parents on what to look for when they suspect a child might have a drug problem.

"Putting this group together gave us the ultimate educational package and . . . we're going to carry on by continuing to provide that education and looking to the congressman for any help he can provide on new trends," said Judge, a 25-year law enforcement officer.

### 'A family disease'

Knight said during the meeting that the use of heroin has changed over the past decade, now often originating with drugs prescribed for sports injuries.

"A lot of the kids who get into sports and have an injury get prescribed something like Oxycontin or Oxycodone and move to heroin when the prescription runs out or they aren't on it anymore," Knight told the task force.

Pat Montoya, board president of the nonprofit Not One More, estimates about 50 percent of



JOAN PAHOYO/Acorn Newspapers

**BRAINSTORMING SESSION**—U.S. Rep. Steve Knight hosts a special meeting of the Simi Valley Task Force on Heroin Prevention in his Los Angeles Avenue office Nov. 24.

adolescents who take prescriptions for a sports injury end up using heroin.

Montoya, a parent and former youth football coach in Simi, said he helped form the task force in 2012 after watching some of his past players become heroin addicts, some of whom overdosed.

"They say it's a choice to pick up and use the first time, but the addictive part comes after that

**About 50 percent of adolescents who take prescriptions for a sports injury end up using heroin**

and that's where we come in," he said. "We've been able to place about 60 to 80 kids in rehab this year and we also work with parents because (addiction) is a family disease."

Kate O'Brien, who represents RSRPD on the task force, said she was unfamiliar with the extent of the city's heroin issue until she joined the group three years ago.

"I would be terrified to be a parent now," she said at the meeting. "Heroin must be awfully easy to get."

"From what I've heard from kids on the street, they can pick (heroin) up anywhere in this town and have it in their pockets within 10 to 15 minutes," Montoya responded.

Jim Vigdor, who represents the Chamber, said drug addiction is a multiprong issue.

For eight years, Vigdor has headed a support group for parents who saw the need to send their children to rehab after they became addicted. Many issues, Vigdor said, stem from problems at home.

"The kids feel entitled, they have too much free time or the relationship between Mom and Dad isn't great," Vigdor told fellow task force members. "(Then) someone comes in and says, 'Try this; you'll feel better,' and, being in a world of instant gratification, drugs seem to be the quick solution to solve the pain.

"The problem is at home and parents need to know what their kids are doing."

### Combating heroin

It will take a lot of work to keep heroin use from growing, let alone reduce the problem, Knight said.

"We have to make sure (the heroin problem) doesn't get worse, to save as many kids as we can," the congressman said.

Vigdor suggested the task force find a way to provide more counseling to addicts through the state's mental health system rather than send them to jail.

"These kids get caught up in something they can't get out of and it's a spiral with no exit . . . until someone reaches out and grabs them," he said.

While Knight would prefer to help someone get clean through counseling rather than incarceration, it isn't that easy, he said.

Montoya agreed, saying most health insurance companies pay for only 30 days of rehab, which is just long enough for someone to get clean and then fall back into using. At a minimum, 90 days is necessary to help addicts get back on track, he said.

Knight said that's why long-term recovery programs like Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous are so important.

The congressman said he hopes to take what he's learned about Simi's heroin problem and continue to search for solutions at the federal level, including looking into what other cities across the United States have done.

## Eye surgery

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field. Therefore a person with Kamra Inlay is able to read and see near without losing much of their distance vision.

The non-dominant eye is usually the preferred eye for the Kamra implant. Laser fashions a pocket in the cornea where the inlay is inserted.

PIE is the permanent procedure for presbyopia. It removes the defective auto-focusing mechanism

of the eye (natural lens). This lens which has deteriorating is replaced by a biocompatible, synthetic nano-engineered implant.

The PIE will sit in the eye for the rest of ones life. It allows each eye to see at varying distances. There are various types of PIE like Restor, Tecnis and Crystalens.

For those with previous eye surgery, presbyopia can still be reversed even if a person had undergone previous Lasik, radial keratotomy or cataract surgery.

So which one is best? Each eye

is unique and every person's lifestyle is different. The best way is to do a personalized, customized treatment planning. It is important to talk to an eye surgeon which one is best for you.

What is the cost of these procedures? The cost of the procedure varies. Mono vision Lasik being at the lower end and PIE at the upper end of the spectrum.

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