

Just put them in the box

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When Jim McIntyre, chief of police, told us recently that the drop-off box for drugs at the Stoneham Police Department had filled up and had to be emptied, I wondered if our town was starting to get the picture.

You see, the prevalence of unused pain killers in our home cabinets has contributed to the drug crisis in our town, state and nation. As those trying to stem the tide of heroin and its tragic consequences know, those little pills we get from our doctors to deal with pain, anxiety or sleeplessness are bait to addicts

So what do pain killers have to do with heroin? Well, many, like OxyContin, Percocet and Vicodin, are virtually the same stuff. And health care workers and addicts alike testify that pain killers are the most-trodden path to heroin.

So if you can't get a doctor to prescribe more pain killers, sedatives or anxiety aids, you buy them from someone you know, or a supplier on the street. Or you clean out the medicine in your grandparents' medicine cabinet. Or, you transition into heroin, which is often cheaper and increasingly available, even though you have no clue about what's in it or its potency.

The Substance Abuse Coalition in town has been spreading the word about pain killers and other drugs and the need to control them. In April, Youth Coalition members will join seniors at the Stoneham Senior Center for a safe-prescription-drug workshop.

Communities around the country are struggling with the opioid crisis, which has claimed or maimed lives in Stoneham and beyond. The Massachusetts House and Senate have passed a comprehensive bill to address and prevent opioid addiction. The legislation is expected to be approved by Governor Charles Baker this week. One piece of the bill will limit physician prescription of pain killers to a seven-day supply. That's a good thing.

Other provisions of the bill will be outlined in the media. For their work on this legislation, we are grateful to Senator Jason Lewis and Representative Michael Day.

In the meantime, the secure drug-deposit box in the lobby of the Police Station on Central Street is accessible 24-7. If you have prescriptions or any drugs you'd like to put out of reach of potential abusers, walk in, open and drop.

It may seem like a small thing to do. But it may, it just may, keep these drugs out of the hands of someone you love.

Note: We should be concerned about other prescription drugs, as well as pain killers. These include benzodiazepines, like Valium and Xanax, and sleep aids, like Ambien and Lunesta. We should also monitor and control the use of drugs used to treat ADHD, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. Even some over-the-counter cough medicines can be harmful when abused. In large doses, cough medicines that include dextromethorphan can get you high and cause hallucinations. It's popular among teens, since cough syrup is so easy to find in medicine cabinets.

Ben Jacques is a member of the Stoneham Substance Abuse Coalition, www.stonehamsac.org. The coalition is also on Facebook.