

'100 percent of drug-related deaths in Montcalm County were opioid-related' in 2016, says report

■ *Heroin, fentanyl were primary causes*

BY ELISABETH WALDON
DAILY NEWS NEWS EDITOR

STANTON — All 11 reported drug-related deaths in Montcalm County last year involved opioids.

Luke Vogelsberg, supervisor and chief investigator for Sparrow Forensic Pathology, presented the annual medical examiner report to Montcalm County's Health & Human Services Committee on Monday morning.

Of the 28 reported accidental deaths in Montcalm County in 2016, 11 were drug-related, slightly down from 15 drug-related deaths in 2015.

"All of them included at least one opioid, so 100 percent of

drug-related deaths in Montcalm County were opioid-related," Vogelsberg said.

"Fentanyl is a highly potent pain-killer and they are now making similar drugs that are structurally similar but way more potent than fentanyl," he added.

Of last year's 11 drug-related deaths involved six males and five female ranging in age from 17 to 65 years old for an average age of 36 years old. Five of the drug-related deaths included heroin and three included fentanyl.

"That's very alarming to me," said Commissioner Jeremy Miller of Greenville regarding the wide range of ages.

Other accidental deaths in Montcalm County included

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At right, Luke Vogelsberg, supervisor and chief investigator for Sparrow Forensic Pathology, presented the annual medical examiner report to Montcalm County's Health & Human Services Committee on Monday morning.

DEATHS

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eight vehicle accidents, five falls, three drownings, two asphyxiations and one farm equipment accident. One of the five falls was also a drug-related death as the fall involved tramadol intoxication.

Montcalm County had 485 overall deaths last year — an increase compared to 454 deaths in 2015, but a decrease compared to 506 deaths in 2014 and 498 deaths in 2013.

Montcalm County had nine reported suicides last year, which is average compared to 10 suicides in 2015, nine in 2014 and 10 in 2013. The county had no homicides last year. Three children died in accidents last year — including a 17-year-old from drug intoxication, a 12-year-old in an off-road vehicle accident and a 1-month-old in an accidental smothering.

Montcalm County had no unclaimed bodies, which Vogelsberg noted was a good

thing as he's already overseen about 20 unclaimed bodies in Ingham County so far this year.

Vogelsberg said naturally medically attended deaths at hospitals are not reported to the medical examiner and thus were not included in his annual report.

MEDICAL EXAMINER COST INCREASE

Sparrow serves as the medical examiner for Barry, Eaton, Ingham, Ionia, Isabella, Livingston, Montcalm and Shiawassee counties, although that may change soon.

Sparrow recently notified Montcalm County of a future \$20,000 per year cost increase.

“For many years, Sparrow Forensic Pathology has operated at an annual deficit of approximately \$500,000, which has been absorbed by Sparrow Health System,” stated a letter from Laboratory Director Jon Baker. “Unfortunately, the financial climate in which we now operate prevents Sparrow

Health System from continuing to subsidize county medical examiner's offices. As such, we have been forced to reevaluate the contracts that we have with the counties that we serve.”

Sparrow will be terminating its current contract with Montcalm County effective Aug. 5, and it's up to Montcalm County commissioners whether they want to approve a new contract with the added cost or find another option for medical examiner services.

Montcalm County has contracted with Sparrow since 2010 for medical examiner services, paying a total of \$134,454 in 2016 and \$136,471 this year. The cost was scheduled to increase by about \$2,000 to \$138,518 in 2018, but is now expected to increase by \$20,000.

Commissioners will discuss their options during their full board meeting at 6 p.m. June 26.

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