

New Narcan vending machines raise concerns

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The announcement of Narcan vending machines coming to the area has sparked some negative reaction. While they have not been stocked with Narcan, or naloxone, yet, people have already taken to social media to complain about the vending machines in Franklin County.

Two weeks ago, the nonprofit organization PreventEd placed empty vending machines in three locations in the area: Mercy Hospital Washington's parking garage, the Franklin County Resource Center in Union and outside of the Scenic Regional Library St. Clair branch.

Within the next week, the machines will be stocked with Narcan, which will be available to the public for free. Narcan, a brand name of naloxone, is an over-the-counter nasal spray that is used to counteract an opioid overdose.

Scenic Regional Library Assistant Director Megan Maurer told *The Missourian* that one of the library's employees has seen negative comments about the machines in a Facebook group, but no one has said anything directly to library staff.

"No one has reached out to the St. Clair branch or Scenic Regional by coming in, through social media, by email, by phone call, or any of that," she said. "We have been receiving feedback, but it's been second-hand feedback."

In the "Pacific MO no Snowflake Zone" Facebook group, phrases like "This is a joke right???" and "This absolutely infuriates me!!" appeared in the comment section

below a photo post of *The Missourian's* article "Narcan vending machines coming" in last week's paper.

"My loved ones didn't choose diabetes, and can barely afford the meds for it!" Jodi Magraw wrote in the comments. "I know people who have passed because they can't take there (sic) diabetic meds on a proper schedule because of cost, etc, so they take less or skip taking some to make it last. Very screwed up!"

Concerns about the

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machines were a discussion topic at the monthly meeting last Wednesday of the Healthy Outcomes through Prevention Education (HOPE) for Franklin County Coalition, which collaborated with PreventEd on the project.

"We expected fully to have some backlash from certain people in the community," HOPE Program Director Julie Hook said. "But we also have a plan for a promotional roll-out as well."

HOPE Coalition members said providing more information to the community about Narcan and the importance of its accessibility has always been their plan for the project.

Hook also addressed some of the public's social media comments.

"You shouldn't have to pay for insulin," she said. "I totally agree. So does

that mean we can only have one or the other?"

Hook also stressed that Narcan is not harmful.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), naloxone, or Narcan, will not harm or cause side effects to someone who is not overdosing.

"Carrying naloxone is no different than carrying an epinephrine auto-injector (commonly known by the brand name EpiPen) for someone with allergies," the CDC website states. "It simply provides an extra layer of protection for those at a higher risk for overdose."

Hook said the vending machines will soon have informational wraps, clings and stickers on them, including how to use the Narcan, what it does and how someone can get help for substance use disorder.

"When people are unaware of something, they ask all the questions, which is good," she said. "We want the three host locations to be prepared to answer those questions."

Hook said fact sheets and pamphlets will be given to each location so the staff will be knowledgeable about Narcan as well as the public, so that people can know why it's important to have Narcan access in the area. Hook said PreventEd will be making a factual video to share with the community as well.

The vending machines will be stocked and fully operational by the first week in October.

Narcan vending machines are being installed across Missouri and nationwide. States with these machines include Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Texas, Michigan, Kentucky, Indiana, California, New York and others.