FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Overdose Antidote Now Available to First Responder Agencies

Gaston County, NC, November 3, 2014 – A new method of medication administration is now being used in Gaston County to treat overdose victims. This method is also now approved for use by Gaston County EMS System first responders and law enforcement personnel. The medication naloxone, also known as Narcan, is an antidote for narcotic overdoses and is being administered via the intranasal route (sprayed into the nostril) to adult victims suffering from a suspected opioid overdose. This route of administration allows first responders in the Gaston County EMS System to administer a medication that has historically been administered only via injection by personnel at the Paramedic level.

Opioid medications such as morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone, or the illicit drug heroin, can cause fatal respiratory depression during an overdose. During an opioid overdose the victim’s respirations can become dangerously slow and eventually stop. Without quick intervention, death occurs. “The most effective intervention to bring respirations back to normal in this situation is to administer naloxone. Within minutes of administration the victim can completely transform from a near-death condition to a stable condition with normal breathing,” said GEMS Lieutenant Travis Adams.

Opioid abuse, particularly involving prescription opioids, has reached epidemic proportions nation-wide and Gaston County is experiencing an increasing frequency of overdose deaths. “Opioid abuse and overdose is not confined to any specific population in Gaston County; it is present in a wide range of victims, from teenagers to the elderly, and throughout socioeconomic levels. GEMS paramedics administered over 480 doses of naloxone last year and on average, someone in Gaston County dies from an unintentional overdose every week. This is a pervasive and perilous disease,” Adams said.

“Naloxone administration programs such as this one which incorporate first responder agencies have had successful results in preventing overdose deaths. Now that this is available in Gaston County, we expect to see similar results with a decreased number of overdose deaths from opioids,” said GEMS Chief Mark Lamphiear.
The first agency in Gaston County to participate in this program is the Cramerton Police Department. They expressed interest to GEMS during the planning phase of this process several months ago and will implement the program during the first week in November.

“The Cramerton Police Department is proud to be the first law enforcement agency in the area to offer this life-saving service to our citizens. We have seen a rise in opioid related overdoses and over dose deaths. Law enforcement is a first-hand witness to the devastating and far-reaching effects of opioid abuse. Training officers and equipping them to deliver this medication will not only potentially save lives but will help those of us in law enforcement deal with this public health and public safety crisis in a smart and effective way,” said Cramerton Police Chief Greg Ratchford. This is not the first partnership between the Cramerton Police Department and Gaston County’s EMS agency; the two agencies have been colleagues for some time with AED response. Cramerton Police Department is paying for officers to be trained and is purchasing the naloxone from the department’s drug forfeiture monies. “I can’t think of a better way to utilize money obtained through drug forfeiture than to put it to use combating the problem from which it was derived,” Ratchford said.

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**GEMS Mission Statement**

**Preserve Life – Promote Safety**

The mission of Gaston County Emergency Medical Services (GEMS) is to preserve and enhance the quality of life for the residents and visitors of Gaston County by providing superior quality Emergency Medical Care.