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On the record

Every month, the Kitchener Citizen publishes "Notes from City Hall" which Kitchener City Councillors can use to communicate with residents.

In addition to highlighting upcoming community events, I often use this as an opportunity to present my position or invite discussion about issues that pertain to citizens.

Here is one that I think bears repeating.

I dropped by the International Overdose Awareness Day event on August 31 in Victoria Park. The fact I am writing about it here demonstrates that it had a big impact on me. I've never seen an overdose victim, or known anyone who died of an overdose, but I've heard many stories.

Here are some things I took away from the event:

1. "This is a national public health crisis. It is an emergency; "we cannot arrest ourselves out of a health crisis".
2. Forty per cent of 911 calls in Ontario are substance use and mental health related, not criminal.
3. We need a safe supply of drugs to reduce overdose deaths.
4. The Consumption Treatment Services is working.
5. More funding is needed for paramedics to take the burden off police during medical emergencies.
6. People use drugs to cope with the harsh realities of everyday existence.
7. Criminalization will never work because it punishes the symptoms rather than addressing the root causes.
8. Unregulated, unsafe drugs contain unknown amounts and strengths of ingredients.
9. The unregulated market leads to violent crimes, shootings and gang formation.
10. "Street drugs are a Russian Roulette game."
11. "We need more treatment beds right now."
12. Someone is dying every third day in the Region.
13. On average it takes seven relapses before recovery.

We have an obligation to do more. This health crisis requires systemic changes from all levels of government.