

Alaska State Legislature



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Anti-Alcoholism Drug Holds Promise **Judiciary Committee Considers Naltrexone's Role in Treatment**

(ANCHORAGE) – The House Judiciary committee and other legislators attended a discussion Thursday on naltrexone, a medication showing promising results in helping address alcoholism in Alaska by chemically reducing addicts' craving for drink.

"The Legislature has been working hard to protect public health and improve public safety through innovative approaches to alcoholism," said Rep. Norman Rokeberg, (R-Anchorage) chairman of the Judiciary Committee. "Naltrexone is proving to be an effective element in combined efforts to keep alcoholics sober."

The committee heard Percy Menzies, a national expert in the pharmaceutical approach to alcoholism, explain how naltrexone has been incorporated in programs for alcoholic offenders to greatly increase the effectiveness of treatment. Naltrexone acts by reducing the sense of euphoria that ordinarily results from drinking alcohol, and has been effective in several Lower 48 anti-alcoholism programs, he said.

Judge James Wanamaker of Anchorage, whose Wellness Court has been offering alcoholic offenders naltrexone with significant success, told legislators that the drug is not cheap: about \$90 per month. However, he noted that each dollar invested in alcoholism treatment saves up to \$7 in costs for police, courts, jails, and hospitals. The Legislature supported the Wellness Court with a \$65,000 grant this year to help participating offenders pay for the initial required medical tests, and to buy their first month's supply of the drug.

Naltrexone is likely to find expanded use following passage of House Bill 172, which creates pilot therapeutic courts in Anchorage and Bethel in which participants take naltrexone as part of a combined treatment program that also includes intense outpatient substance abuse treatment, and strict court reporting requirements.

Those attending included Reps. Kevin Meyer (R-Anchorage), Con Bunde (R-Anchorage), John Coghill (R-North Pole) and Jeannette James (R-Fairbanks). Numerous other House and Senate members were also represented by staff members.

"This discussion will help us consider further legislative measures that may be needed during the coming session to address legal and treatment issues associated with alcoholic offenders," Rokeberg said.

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