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Addicts given life-saving courses

Drug users in South Wales are being given life saving training in an attempt to reduce deaths from overdoses.

In the first project of its kind in Wales, addicts and the professionals they come into contact with are being taught techniques including heart massage.

Four courses are taking place in Neath, Port Talbot and Bridgend on Wednesday and Friday. They are a direct result of a conference held at Port Talbot's Princess Royal Theatre earlier this month, which was attended by more than 200 people involved in the drug treatment field.

Organisers say there are no accurate figures as to the number of overdose deaths in the region because of the way they are recorded. But area project manager for the West Glamorgan Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Ifor Glyn, said the number of young people injecting heroin in South Wales had risen dramatically in the past five years.

"It is extremely difficult to say how many people have died from heroin – even the assembly is not able to provide figures" he said. "A lot of drug deaths are overlooked, but if you asked most people working in the field they will know of more than one."

The conference was called to highlight the issue of drug-related deaths and My Glyn said it quickly became apparent there was a need for better education and training.

"There was a lot of interest afterwards from the drug agencies from the community" he added.

Now probation officers, bail hostel workers and other professionals, as well as the users themselves will receive the training. It could be extended in the future to families of addicts. Neath/Port Talbot and Bridgend councils were also involved as was the Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust.

Strategy development officer for Neath/Port Talbot Martin Riley said it was the first conference of its kind in Wales.

The aim was to help keep people keep an overdose victim alive until the emergency services are at the scene. "They are not deliberate – they are accidental overdoses," said Mr Riley. "They leave behind a tragedy and for some families it can take many years before they can cope. Often with the media an overdose is portrayed as another junkie dies. But it could be a mother of two children, someone's daughter or son."