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What do a veterinarian, a former district attorney and a nationally known author all have in common? They've all been guest presenters in the National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Forensic Technology Center of Excellence (FTCoE) webinar series on combatting the opioid epidemic in the United States.

NIJ's FTCoE, which is part of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System, launched the series in July and has a total of 15 episodes planned through the end of 2017. Through early October, the first six webinars had drawn a total of nearly 1,600 participants. Archival versions of the events can be found on the FTCoE website for those who missed the live presentations or who just want to go back and hear the information a second time. Archival presentations are posted

within 48 hours of the live events, which have drawn up to nearly 600 registrants.

One webinar featured Sam Quinones, author of *Dreamland: The True Tale of America's Opiate Epidemic*, who discussed the research that went into creating his award-winning nonfiction bestseller. In addition to Quinones, a veterinarian who talked about the importance of canine (K9) officers carrying appropriate doses of naloxone for their dogs, and a former district attorney speaking on legal aspects of the epidemic, presenters have included a number of toxicologists and research professionals talking about the more technical aspects of dealing with the epidemic.



“We didn’t want to focus on one specific area, and we’ve pulled in quite a few subject-matter experts from various disciplines,” says the FTCoE’s Josh Vickers. “We wanted to be sure we hit on all the angles of dealing with the epidemic.”

The webinars last approximately one hour, with a 45-minute presentation and a planned 15-minute question-and-answer

session. Vickers says the Q&As have helped draw out valuable information such as how to get funding for the canine naloxone, and each

webinar also includes information on how to contact the speaker for more information. No matter what the topic, results from post-webinar surveys have been overwhelmingly positive.

The idea to create a webinar series focusing on varied topics came from FTCoE Director Jeri Roper-Miller along with NIJ forensic staff, who says she found that over the past several years, conferences and summits on the opioid epidemic tended to have a very narrow, often state-centric focus.

“They would focus on a certain component like treatment and rehabilitation or safety issues with first responders,” Roper-Miller says. “There were only a few where different stakeholders came together to give a broader perspective and to talk about ways the people could interact to figure out better solutions.”

As with every emerging hot topic, the FTCoE looked for the best way to transfer knowledge about opioids, and with the need to bring various disciplines together, a webinar series with a wide range of presenters seemed like the best channel, she says.

“We not only brought in forensic practitioners, we brought in first responders, behavioral psychologists, social scientists and others,” she says. And although the center usually tries to stay with technical experts in various disciplines, scoring the interview with Quinones was a bonus that brought added

popularity to the series.

“I was trying to get him to speak at a conference where I was on the planning committee, and that didn’t work out. However, I saw on his website that he would do Skype interviews for book clubs if they could guarantee at least 30 participants. I did a cold call and said I could deliver way more than 30 audience members, and he said he would do it. He’s not the type to do slides and a formal presentation; it really was just him sharing his story with us via webcam and it went really well,” she says.

All of the webinars have drawn a wide-ranging audience that includes forensic professionals, law enforcement officers and others.

“It’s a topic where there is a critical need for people to step across the lines so that everyone knows the different steps involved in responding to the epidemic and how we can all work together to be more proactive. There’s a need to understand what the different components are, what the challenges are and how we can collaborate to meet those challenges,” she says.

To access the webinar archives, sign up for future events or learn more about the series, visit <https://forensiccoe.org/webinar/opioid-crisis-a-public-health-ency-webinar-series/>.

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