

Cause of overdose under investigation

Thursday, April 28, 2005

By Aisha I. Jefferson

Locust Grove Police are investigating whether prescription drugs were responsible for the death of a 27-year-old Locust Grove man early Sunday morning.

Two friends of James E. "Iggy" Beckham were performing CPR on him when Locust Grove Police first arrived on the scene, according to Locust Grove Police Chief Jesse Patton. The officers attempted to revive Beckham with an automatic external defibrillator until the EMS arrived, but they could not find a heart rhythm, Patton said.

Beckham, of Boulder Drive in Locust Grove, was pronounced dead at Henry Medical Center later Sunday.

Twenty to 30 Xanax pills, along with two or three Oxycontin pills wrapped in plastic, were found in Beckham's rectum, according to Patton.

"The plastic bag had apparently busted or leaked," Patton said, adding that police are assuming that Beckham placed the drugs there himself. "It's a good possibility he died from a drug overdose."

Patton said the cause of death would be known in two to three months when the toxicology results return. No one has been charged with any crimes in the investigation, he said.

Although Xanax and Oxycontin, Schedule III and Schedule II drugs respectively, can be obtained with a prescription, it is illegal to have them without one. Beckham did not have a prescription for either drug, Patton said.

"There is definitely more (Oxycontin), but we're not sure how much more because they dissolved," said Patton, adding that Beckham didn't swallow the pills.

According to police, Beckham's friends called authorities around 6:52 a.m. Sunday when they found he was not breathing. Beckham had spent the night with friends who lived in the Skyland Park subdivision in Locust Grove.

"He was passed out during the night, and his friend went in to check on him the next morning, and he wasn't breathing, according to his friend," Patton said.

Although Locust Grove Police interviewed three witnesses Wednesday who were with Beckham prior to his death, they are still trying to determine why the drugs were placed in Beckham's rectum.

"We really don't know what he was doing," Patton said. "We can't find anybody that will say he was trying to conceal anything from police."

Patton said he does not know if Beckham was transporting the drugs for illegal purposes or had plans to sell them.

Beckham does not have a criminal history with Locust Grove Police.

Around midnight Sunday, Beckham's friend, Michael New, picked him up from a location in Spaulding County and brought him back to Locust Grove, according to the police report. Police also went to that location with New as well to Beckham's residence.

While searching Beckham's room, Locust Grove Police found an empty bottle of the drug Soma that was prescribed to him.

Pharmacist Frances Glenn, who works at Henry Medical Center, said Xanax is prescribed to help with anxiety or calm people's nerves.

"Twenty milligrams of Xanax is a big, big dose," Glenn said. "Anything over 4 milligrams per day of Xanax is a possible overdose."

Glenn said she has never seen more than 10 milligrams of Xanax given per day.

Oxycontin is narcotic that is prescribed as a pain reliever, and Glenn said no more than 80 milligrams should be taken daily. "Dosages are specific, depending on what's going on with the patient," she said.

Combining Xanax and Oxycontin, Glenn said, increases the chances that a person will stop breathing.

Patton said his department makes 10 or 12 arrests annually relating to possession of Schedule II and Schedule III drugs.

"It's a problem throughout Henry County," Patton said.