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Increasing Substance Safety Concentrating on the Fentanyl Epidemic

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Increasing Substance Safety Concentrating on the Fentanyl Epidemic

Abstract

An action plan designed to combat the fentanyl epidemic, I plan to educate others on the dangers of fentanyl by sharing and debunking common misconceptions and research online in a digestible format. To do so, I plan to create a website and Instagram account that has a global outreach to educate others and alleviate the stigma around substance use and death by fentanyl poisoning. Furthermore, the project is to spread awareness of current efforts and resources in specific areas in South Central PA, such as Adams County, Franklin, and Cumberland Counties.

Keywords

Fentanyl Epidemic, Substance Safety, Resource

Disciplines

Chemicals and Drugs | Health and Physical Education | Public Policy

Comments

This poster was created based on work completed for FYS 108-1: Policy Change Through Agency and Activism, and presented as a part of the eighth annual CAFE Symposium on February 8, 2023.

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Increasing Substance Safety Concentrating on the Fentanyl Epidemic

Regarding Counties in South Central PA

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Overview of the Problem

The fentanyl epidemic is the deadliest wave of the ongoing opioid epidemic crisis. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is an approved medication for treating severe pain that is prescribed as a transdermal patch or lozenge. Fentanyl, in a pharmaceutical comparison, is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Fentanyl is highly addictive and challenging to find a non-lethal dose, which starts a problem.

My Proposal

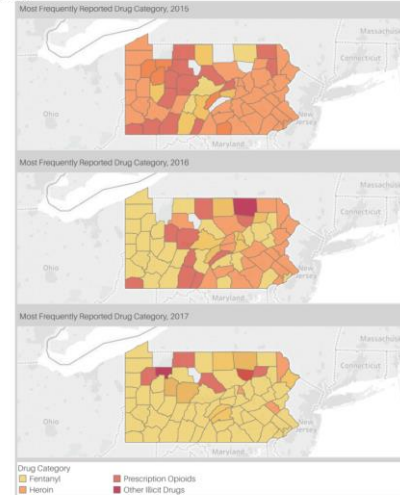
My action plan is to increase safety, and the knowledge of accessible resources, dispel misinformation and alleviate substance use stigma. To combat the fentanyl epidemic in this regard, I plan to create online resources (website/Instagram account) devoted to digestible research and a portal for resources. My action plan is to reduce substance use fatalities and to recognize drug use will never go away in its entirety. My action plan is not the encouragement of drug use or the promotion of legalizing illicit substances.

The effect on South Central PA

Although media can have a global outreach, I still shine a light on how the fentanyl epidemic has affected South Central PA. Between 2015-2017, almost every county in PA reports fentanyl as the leading drug category in drug-related overdoses, with the remaining few being other prescription opioids. In 2021, there were 17 drug-related overdoses in Adams County, with 14 linked to heroin or fentanyl (Writer). In 2017 there were 349 exhibits of seized and analyzed Fentanyl substances in York County, PA. Furthermore, there were 11 in Adams County.

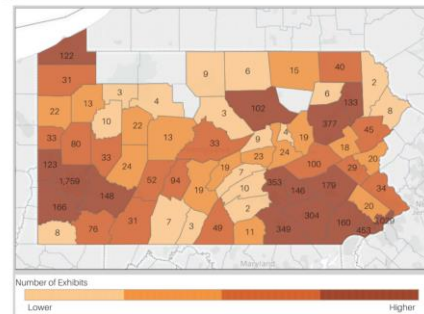
IMPACT

(U) Figure 25. Most Frequently Reported Drug Category in Drug-Related Overdose Decedents, Pennsylvania, 2015-2017



Source: Pennsylvania Coroner/Medical Examiner Data

(U) Figure 10. Seized and Analyzed Fentanyl and Fentanyl-Related Substance Exhibits by Pennsylvania County, 2017



Source: NPLIS

(The Opioid Threat in Pennsylvania)



Lethal dose of fentanyl compared to the size of a penny



Comparing lethal doses of heroin, fentanyl, and carfentanil
 ("Experimental Vaccine Blunts the Deadliest of Synthetic Opioids")

Dispelling Misinformation

The most prominent misconception is where a substance originates and when lacing in the manufacturing and distribution process occurs. China is the largest producer of fentanyl, with an estimated 90% of illicit fentanyl in the United States originating and being traced back to China ("Download | U.S. Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia"). One of the largest known fentanyl drug rings is run by Jian Zhang in China, protected by China law when pursued by the U.S. Department of Justice and Treasury (Westhoff). Then, within China or sent to partners of criminal organizations, primarily in Mexico or Canada, the fentanyl is then cut into other drugs such as heroin, cocaine, etc., or pressed into counterfeit pills that can look like a sleeping pill, Xanax, or any other prescription pill. Another concern within the production and manufacturing process is the risk of cross-contamination. Fentanyl itself is 50 times more potent than heroin. Carfentanil is one of the most popular and potent fentanyl analogs and the most common analog to be cut with another drug. Carfentanil is 100 times more potent than fentanyl; compared to morphine, it is 10,000 times more potent ("DEA Issues Carfentanil Warning to Police and Public").

Current Resources

Gettysburg College Counseling and Wellness Services hope to provide further support to students suffering from substance abuse disorder. Currently, they offer an entirely confidential biweekly counseling program. Other resources include the RASE Project, The Drew Michael Taylor Foundation, and The Harbor. The RASE Project runs the Mercy House, a recovery program house in Adams County. The Drew Michael Taylor Foundation provides grief support group programs for all ages with specific programs for those who lost anyone to substance use. The Harbor is a non-alcoholic serving bar that offers a sense of community and other programs.