
The Opioid Crisis

In the late 20th century, the United States fell victim to thousands of tragic deaths accredited to prescription drug overdoses. Often times, someone who is in the hospital receiving opioids to control pain for prolonged periods can become an addict, as their body gets used to numbing the pain. While medical professionals have learned to take many precautions when it comes to using these drugs, the epidemic has shot back up in the last ten years. The saddest part of it all, these dangerous drugs will not be going anywhere anytime soon. Research done at the University of Pittsburgh has recently emerged and brought new light to the world of drug overdoses.

The Opioid Crisis: Forgotten, not Finished Deadly Addictions Dr. Donald Burke and his team at the University of Pittsburgh have made a chilling discovery about the plague that is overdosing. For the past four decades, the number of deaths has grown at an almost perfect exponential rate. The numbers fall into a smooth upward curve, increasing the number of lives lost as the years go on. When the “original” opioid crisis began, nobody really identified that it was happening until it had already ended. Now, the research and medicine has become very advanced, and people like Dr. Burke have the knowledge and means to end an epidemic like this one. The main point of research for the team was to see if the growth curve of overdoses would remain constant for future years. In the article, they touch on the diversity of drug overdoses, meaning the statistics for every different type vary greatly. For example, Heroin deaths have spiked in the last 8 years, while methadone deaths have been at a climb down since the early 2000’s. They also wanted to see if the demographics had any patterns, like the age, race, and gender of who had overdoses. This further proved the difficulty in pinpointing exactly where and how this epidemic started. Nonetheless, they persisted in studying why so many people are dying. They found a steady pattern of deaths, with no pattern of cause. Dr. Burke and his team have most certainly made an impact on this issue, but nobody is anywhere near ending an epidemic of this size. With the low price, the popularization, and the heavy manufacturing of these substances, there is some explanation to how the crisis has grown so large. The combination of accessibility and depleting outlooks on life, it almost seems that a drug crisis will forever be existent. From the team’s point of view, even being able to slow down the insane growth of lost lives is a major breakthrough, and seems to be their main goal for the future at this point.

The impact of drug related deaths on the world Whenever a new celebrity dies of an overdose, the media is the first to let the world know. In the past 50 years, there have been so many drug related deaths, even ones from our own generations. People like Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix died during our parent’s childhoods, while Lil Peep and Mac Miller passed during our own. I think that seeing notable people die to such scary and harmful circumstances tend to spark a change in people’s lives, but that is not true of every situation. Obviously, this study is telling us that opioids have become killers, even if that was not the original intent. We will never be able to abolish painkillers, or even recreational drugs like heroin, but we also cannot sit around and watch people ruin their own lives. On the other hand, we have to look at things from the perspective of someone who dies because of an overdose. Why are they using drugs? The easiest thing to say is that they are addicted and cannot stop; which is often true, but why did they start in the first place? Depression, anxiety, and an overall seemingly bleak future could all

be answers, but no matter the reason, they needed help. I think we have been through enough red ribbon week presentations to know drugs are never the answer, but clearly not everyone knows that.

What does this epidemic say about the rest of the world? While we sit here and talk about how unfortunate it is that people are out there ruining their lives, nothing is being done to actually stop it. I am certainly not saying that it is the fault of anyone else, but we also cannot blame everything on the addicts who end up taking their own lives. Addiction is a disease, one that victims do not understand until it is already too late. I believe that something can and will be done in the future regarding the opioid crisis, but it will be a team effort. Research like that discussed in the article is breaking that barrier, but so much more can be done. Additionally, I think the stigma surrounding drugs and addiction needs to be cleared up a lot, because no one is going to get anywhere if we cannot even communicate.

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