

Every Nineteen Minutes and Counting

By Sheila Johnson

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), in 2016 opioids (derivatives of opium) accounted for almost sixty-four thousand lethal overdoses in America, and they were the most frequent form of death for Americans under fifty years old. The resulting deaths far exceeded those from guns, car crashes, and HIV at its peak. In October 2017 the use of opioids was declared to be a national emergency. In addition to the US government, the increase and rapid use of opioids have negatively affected social, financial, cultural, sociological, and religious institutions.

Originally, the use of opioids was the first line of treatment for pain management in cancer patients. Medical professionals deemed that it was more effective than heroin, and began to prescribe opioids for other diseases. Patients felt it was a “miracle” painkiller and unfortunately the price tag for opioids created an illicit market for its use. It now comes in a synthetic known as fentanyl which is easily produced in the lab and marketed as heroin. It increases the chance of overdose in patients, because they don’t know what it is, but they know it’s less expensive.

Fentanyl, in its weakest form, is still a more potent painkiller than pure opium and heroin. It can be manufactured much quicker, because unlike heroin, it does not have to be harvested from poppy seeds. Fentanyl can be found in medicine cabinets all over the US. As of now, the federal government is not setting quotas to the medical field, but doctors are being told to try and avoid prescribing fentanyl because people are becoming insensitive to pain because of the overuse. Consequently, patients will use more and become addicted to this drug which has proven to be fatal, and statistics show that it keeps getting worse.

So how are you and I affected?

Under the new Washington Administration drug addicts are ineligible to receive treatment under Medicaid. Over-dosage has skyrocketed; morgues have run out of room for bodies, and are renting out extra space in trailers for the dead; grandparents are raising third generation children; babies are orphaned and foster care is harder to find; retirement plans are depleted; financial costs for mortuaries are climbing; our homeless population are becoming cities; drug treatment programs have long waiting lists; and the debate over how to cure this epidemic is getting hotter and hotter.

Do we support harm reduction programs that will provide legally sanctioned “safe” injection sites (user stations) providing clean needles and syringes, medical supervision, oxygen tanks, and mental health clinicians? Or do we support the penal system that exacerbates this chronic relapsing disease?

Do we ban the import of fentanyl that is manufactured in China which has the most relaxed regulations of most of the world? Or do we contribute to the already high rate of suicide of users who cannot afford their habit and live in isolation?

Trump declared it a public health emergency, assigned Chris Christy and Kelly Ann Conway to investigate this national emergency, and has allocated a whopping \$50, 000 to the cause.

Every nineteen minutes a baby is born to an opioid mother. Nineteen minutes and counting...