



Opinion Article

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An All Too Common Loss: The Tragic Story of My Beloved Son, Jacob

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Opinion

When someone's cause of death is drug related it is always hard to overcome the stigma of the deceased being an addict. It takes friends and family to truly convey who this person was that addiction devastated. Jacob was a beautiful child with curly brown hair and big brown eyes that lit up every room he entered. As a child, his signature outfit was the (a) cowboy hat, boots, and spurs that jingled as he walked. To be part of Jacob's life was to experience his complete love and acceptance. The well-being of others, whether human or animal, was his passion. Jacob showed kindness and compassion to his family, friends, and to everyone he touched.

It seems counterintuitive for an addict, but Jacob's life was consumed by healthy eating, working out and generally living by the philosophy of my body is a temple. To see him you would never know he was consumed by drugs. He did not fall into the unfortunate stereotype of an addict.

Sadly, he was introduced to opioids in the junior year of high school when his dentist prescribed them after his wisdom teeth were removed. Many of his fellow classmates and friends were prescribed the same painkillers from their trusted orthodontic practices. The rise in Opioid abuse is directly connected to overprescribing and unfortunately, drug misuse amongst teens has become of significant concern [1,2]. The pre-frontal cortex of the brain is not fully developed until well into the twenties with pathways being wired to help with impulse control, strategic thinking and decision making, focus, and goal setting [2]. Drug use can lead to permanent damage of these important developing neural pathways making it difficult for teens to cultivate these

skills and subjecting drug users to life-long addictive patterns and challenges [2].

People who become addicted to opioid prescriptions often turn to other substances such as cocaine, meth, Percocet, and Xanax, made worse by not knowing they are laced with Fentanyl [3]. One kilogram of Fentanyl has the potential to kill 500,00 people and it is nearly impossible to distinguish how much Fentanyl is in a pill [4]. To date, twelve of my son's graduating class have overdosed.

Jacob's inner weakness was his greatest strength. His personal loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic compelled him to consistently check on his friends and family to make sure they were happy. At almost one year of sobriety, the stress of dealing with the pandemic paired with the intense feeling of isolation brought depression and relapse. Battling addiction and loneliness together was more than Jacob could endure. Sadly, Jacob lost his seven-year battle with drug addiction peacefully at home in January, 2021 just seven days after his 25th birthday.

More than 100,000 Americans died of drug overdoses during the 12 months following the COVID-19 lockdowns [5]. This is the highest number of recorded deaths due to overdose within a one-year timespan. Opioid related deaths increased by 38% with the largest increase in the age range of 15-24 [6]. Fentanyl was the leading cause of overdose with deaths at 68% numbering 42,700 [7,8]. Drug related deaths have become so common that location, race, gender, income-level have all been deeply affected. Substance abuse is just as prevalent in rural areas as in urban settings [9].

It is easy to read numbers and percentages and not equate those to a human life. But now, we need only to open our newspaper and scan the obituaries in our own communities to be shocked and saddened by the pervasiveness of this epidemic. My son departed this life too soon and he is deeply missed. But just as Jacob is my beacon of light, our hope is that his story will serve as a warning that we must work to end this epidemic that has taken so many of our children, family members, and friends.

Acknowledgement

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Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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