

GUEST EDITORIAL

FROM THE MEDFORD TRIBUNE

Fentanyl becoming more deadly

The crisis of opioid addiction has captured the attention of the public, lawmakers and the medical community. But at the same time progress is being made against over-prescribing opioid painkillers, street drugs laced with fentanyl are becoming more common and more deadly.

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid much more powerful than heroin and far cheaper, leading drug traffickers to add it to batches of street heroin to increase profits. Users have no idea when heroin they buy has been adulterated with fentanyl, and the drug is so powerful a tiny amount is deadly. Even more alarming, fentanyl has been turning up in non-opioid street drugs, including methamphetamine and cocaine.

As a result of the attention paid to the opioid epidemic, overdose deaths from prescription oxycontin have dropped to sixth place in the U.S. Heroin was the second-most deadly drug in 2016. Fentanyl was number one. And deaths attributed to fentanyl overdoses are on the rise.

In 2011, fentanyl was involved in 4 percent of overdose deaths. Five years later, the figure was 29 percent, resulting in more than 18,000 deaths.

Why drug traffickers would lace heroin with fentanyl is fairly easy to figure out. It's far cheaper than heroin, and has a similar depressant effect. Why cocaine, a stimulant, would be laced with an opioid is less obvious. Drug experts have suggested it may be simple carelessness: traffickers cutting a batch of heroin using the same surfaces and equipment to process cocaine without cleaning it first.

Regardless of the reason, fentanyl clearly poses an extreme risk, especially to a cocaine abuser who may be unaccustomed to the effects of opioid use. That's why it's more important than ever to get naloxone, which can save lives by reversing the effects of overdose, into the hands of police officers and drug users. A chilling account recently described a Jan. 12 incident in Chico, California, where responding officers were able to save 12 of 13 overdose victims by administering naloxone. Police believe fentanyl was involved.

It's not a perfect solution — getting users to stop taking opioids and other illicit drugs is the long-term goal. But addiction treatment can't help a drug user who dies of an overdose.



Your views

Alexis: 'Ice Cream Patrol' continues to serve

To the Editor:
Most local folks have heard of our group, the Ice Cream Patrol. Our leader is Butch Boettcher, who lives in Union. We most often meet on Friday mornings at the Post Acute Rehab Center on Gekeler Road. Besides Butch, other members are Jerry Blankenship, Russell Fowler, Darrel Plank, Tucker Billman and myself. Each visit to the Post Acute Rehab turns up new veterans and occasionally men and women from the close area. Hardly ever do we get turned down on the offer of ice cream.

Quite often some of our guys were serving in the same country at the same time as those we are visiting. I learned something interesting recently: that

military medics are always guarded by a machine gunner. The enemy would love to kill the medic so that the wounded soldier would be left to die.

I salute all veterans who have served our country.

*Fred Alexis
La Grande*

Baretto: Inspire through possibility rather than fear

To the Editor:
Glenn Mollette's fascinating application of the power of fear ('The Observer, Jan. 16) inspired me to write. Fear can be a life-sustaining force that motivates us toward safety; fear can also be an exploitative threat of how bad things are going to get ... if you don't support whatever it is the exploiter is attempting to market. A "downward spiral" of

anxious thoughts often occurs when we read/hear/believe fear-based predictions, leading to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness.

True leaders (and we are all leaders in our own unique ways) lead with possibility rather than fear. Possibility encourages vision and participation and allows us to get back on a track that inspires common-sense thinking and creative solutions.

Is it possible that some people in this country without legal documentation are not "robbers and thieves"? Is it possible that walls are not the best or only available boundary? Beware the downward spiral; it can be a tough pit from which to emerge. And beware the exploiters of fear; they usually have a short-term agenda.

As we move forward into 2019, I hope all of us lead-

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LETTERSTO THE EDITOR**

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ers challenge ourselves to side-step threats, pits and downward spirals and to inspire through possibility rather than fear.

*Patrice Barreto
La Grande*

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