

I. Introduction

- A. January 14, 2017 is the day that changed how I looked at and valued life. I remember getting back from the mall with my mom, when my dad got a call that sent me to tears and screams. My cousin Taylor had died from a drug overdose. We immediately rushed to my cousins house to be with and grieve with the rest of my family.
- B. The opioid epidemic is a rising issue that needs your help in educating and treating those with possible symptoms.
- C. Main Points
 - 1. Opioids are becoming easily accessible/available by doctors, the internet, social networks, and the black market.
 - 2. The effects of opioids on the brain is what makes them so addictive, by educating others, we can solve the opioid epidemic.
 - 3. Awareness of the user and their peers is the first step in helping others.
 - 4. Drug addiction treatment reduces drug use and its associated health and social costs. We need more affordable and accessible treatment facilities and treatment options.

II. Body of Speech

- A. According to the *National Institute on Drug Abuse*, every day, more than 130 people in the United States die after overdosing on opioids. 70,000 died of opioid overdose in 2017 alone.
 - 1. There are many different types of opioids: prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl. Doctors prescribe opioids all of the time and they affect all demographics, meaning rich, poor, black, white, young and old people.
 - a. When Opioid pills through medical providers become unavailable and or too expensive, users often turn to obtaining Heroin or Fentanyl “on the streets”,by the black market, or over the internet, illegally. Fentanyl is 50 to 100 times stronger than Heroin by itself. Often pills are made to look exactly like Xanax, Hydrocodone, Oxycodone or other prescription Opiate based pain medications but are cut with or are entirely made of Fentanyl. This is done because Fentanyl is cheaper and combining it produces more and a better high producing product. Many unsuspecting people are dying from Fentanyl overdoses because of this marketing and sales tactic.
- A. The drug binds to opioid receptors on cells of the brain or other parts of the body. The binding of these receptors blocks pain and targets the brain’s reward center by flooding

the circuit with dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that regulates movement, emotion, cognition, motivation and feelings of pleasure.

1. Addiction is a condition in which something that started out pleasurable now feels like something you can't live without. Opioids are one of the most addictive drugs because it controls the brain's reward center.
 - a. A common reason that opioids are so addictive, are that people develop a tolerance for the drug and feel driven to increase the dosage to keep feeling good, or pain free. When we educate others about how addictive opioids are and how they work, we can save one life at a time.

B. My cousin Taylor started taking oxycodone for recovery of a shoulder injury from football. Doctors prescribed it for the pain and when he couldn't get them anymore, he got it from drug dealers. He started taking xanax, which treats anxiety and panic disorders. Taylor went into rehab, but did not last long. He started to be aware of his problem but was unable to continue with it. He died, from taking pills that looked like Xanax and Hydrocodone.

1. I had no idea that any of this was happening due to my young age. I wish I was more aware of the situation because maybe I could have done something different.
 - a. Despite how prevalent this problem is most people don't know much about it and are not aware when someone around them is using until it is too late. Many families who do know that someone is addicted do not want to talk about it or let anyone else know. Keeping it a secret is a symptom of the disease of addiction disorder. Even when you know what is going on, helping someone help himself or herself, can be very difficult. The more people who know and understand addiction the better chance the addicted person has.
 - b. My family recently created a house bill that would punish black market dealers more if the selling of their product kills the user. With this hardship in our family, it feels good to go out into the world and try to and make a difference. Now that I am fully aware of the side effects that pain relievers and opioids have, I believe in stopping the epidemic and helping rehabilitation centers become affordable and more accessible.

C. More than 23 million people in the United States need addiction treatment, but today only about 2 million get it. Once a person is aware of their addiction problem, they will be more likely to enter rehab. Treatment dropout is one of the nations major issues.

1. Substance abuse costs our nation over \$600 billion annually and treatment can help reduce these costs.

- a. Treatment can be very expensive, especially for those in long-term care. It's also hard to receive treatment; In the United States there are only 14,500 treatment facilities.

III. Conclusion

The opioid epidemic has become a public health crisis with devastating consequences, including increases to opioid misuse and overdose. After being exposed to this type of deaths firsthand, my awareness to helping others has increased tremendously. Opioid receptors affect the brain, causing an overflow in the brain's reward center. With the issue of opioids becoming more obtainable, treatment is needed more than ever. Providing more counseling and rehabilitation centers for those struggling will decrease the overdose deaths. With this number being very high and having a personal relation to this issue, you need to help. We need to be the generation that stops the opioid epidemic. Now that all of you are aware of this issue, you will go out and educate those around you and give help for those users that are struggling with an addiction.

Works Cited

National Institute on Drug Abuse. "Opioids." *NIDA*,
www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids#summary-of-the-issue.

Personal Interview: Brian Martinek