

Speaker 1:

Six, ten, three, eight, seven.

Speaker 2:

Roger.

Speaker 3:

Ten, two, four.

Speaker 3:

Send a unit for 10-17 [inaudible 00:00:00].

Scotty Sandow:

One, two, three, four. One, two, three, four.

Chris Gray:

Hi, I'm Chris Gray.

Scotty Sandow:

I'm Scotty Sandow.

Chris Gray:

Welcome back to the One Pill Can Kill podcast.

Scotty Sandow:

So far on this series, we've introduced you to Chris and Laura Didier who lost their remarkable son Zach to fentanyl poisoning. We also met our health and human services' director, Dr. Rob Oldham, who talked about the deadly effects of fentanyl and how the fentanyl crisis evolved from the opioid epidemic we've heard so much about.

Chris Gray:

Fake pills and fentanyl [inaudible 00:00:54] street drugs have proliferated across our country. They are getting into the hands of our sons and daughters. And sadly Placer County is no exception, no exception, no exception, no exception. It's a tough reality of hidden drug dealers, stealthy social media, and the tremendous heartache of handling the department and the loved ones they leave behind.

Scotty Sandow:

No one understands that reality better than our Placer County Sheriff's Office. Today, you'll hear from three members of our Sheriff's and Coroner's Office about what narcotics detectives, school resource officers and our deputy coroners are seeing in our communities.

Chris Gray:

Up first, a narcotics detective joins us to discuss disrupting the dispersion of the illegal drug supply on social media. Just a quick note here, the detective's voice has been modulated to protect their cover and identity.

Scotty Sandow:

Can you tell us a little bit about the market for fentanyl? Where is it coming from? Where do you think it's being manufactured and how do you think it's finding its way into the community?

Speaker 6:

So, unfortunately, Placer County is not exempt from the fentanyl epidemic that is taken over this country. Fentanyl, specific to our community, we're seeing it in main forms of either being raw form of fentanyl or in pill form. As far as some logistics about fentanyl, some scientifically proven facts is that fentanyls' approximately a hundred times stronger than other opiates that you might encounter on the street, including morphine, heroin, and oxycodone. As far as manufacturing, at this point it's our belief that most fentanyl analogs are being produced overseas in China and then they're being distributed over to Mexico. And in Mexico is where they're being processed either into the raw fentanyls that they are or into the counterfeit pills that we frequently see.

Chris Gray:

As mentioned in our previous episode with Dr. Oldham illegally manufactured fentanyl street drugs are not the same as legally manufactured drugs prescribed by your doctor.

Speaker 6:

We're seeing that there's multiple fentanyl analogs that are being made. And what I mean by that is a fentanyl analog is simply just an analog of an illicit and also often deadly alteration to a medically prescribed drug, in this case fentanyl. There's analogs are similar the chemical structure of the drug but also mimic the pharmaceutical effects of the drug. We're seeing a big swing in opiate related either addicts or people are experimenting with opiate type drugs that fentanyl is essentially taking over. We're seeing less and less of a heroin on the street and more of fentanyl. And that's simply just because its availability, its effectiveness, its cost, and its addictive nature.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

The idea that in different generations, you could go and experiment, that doesn't exist anymore.

Scotty Sandow:

This is Nicole Moynier. She's the Chief Deputy Coroner with the Placer County Sheriff's Office. She joined us to give us a better understanding of how deadly serious of a situation fentanyl is in Placer County.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

You could go and try and purchase Xanax which theoretically should be safe if prescribed by a licensed medical practitioner, all of those stipulations in place. But what you're purchasing on the street is no longer Xanax, it used to be. If you go and try and purchase oxycodone, it's not what it used to be. We're finding fentanyl mixed in with almost everything at this point but there's no way for you to know what's actually in that drug. Your local drug dealer is not a chemist. You have no idea what you are attempting to ingest and that is the scary portion of this.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

15 years ago, I don't want to say you knew what you were purchasing or you knew what you were about to take, but the idea of back in the seventies, "I'm going to smoke some weed and take some psilocybin", that's not the case anymore. We're finding fentanyl in weed now so it's no longer safe. It never was safe. But at this point, the idea that you could attempt to use something once and die is a very real possibility out there. And that is the scary portion of fentanyl. You don't know. It really is a game of Russian roulette with drugs. Drugs have never been safe but when you add fentanyl into it, the best way to put it is a true Russian roulette scenario where the odds are actually rather high that you will encounter fentanyl in almost anything you go to purchase now. And there's no way to know. So you're taking a gamble each time you go and do it.

Sgt. Ty Connors:

One of the detectives told me, and it was really good analogy, because parents are like, "How do you explain why these pills are so dangerous?"

Scotty Sandow:

This is Sergeant Ty Connors with the Placer County Sheriff's Office. He leads PCSOs school resource officer program.

Sgt. Ty Connors:

I asked him, I go, "How is it that one pill can be say fatal and then the next one is not?" Obviously that the need and the desire of these pills, because they're getting way more of the ones that make you feel good than the ones that kill you. And I go, well, "Why is that?" And he goes, "Well, look at it as these backdoor labs is like a pancake batter. When you're stirring it all up, you're mixing all the stuff, you have these big chunks of flour that didn't mix." He goes, "That's the problem with this unregulated type of creation of this thing. Is there once in a while will have that pancake chunk in one pill that's fatal." And so that was, it really good, spelled it out to me in a simple term, and maybe it's something that parents can try and push out to their kids, of why it's just so unpredictable.

Scotty Sandow:

We'll hear more from Sergeant Connors in a moment about the efforts being made every day on our school campuses.

Speaker 6:

Prices range vary on multiple factors like location of where you bought it, as well as relationship from buyer to dealer. A typical pill as of right now is going to range between \$8 to \$10, per pill. So if you're getting 10 doses, it's a dollar a use, depending on the potency. And again, we have to remember that these pills are not being pressed and made in legitimate pharmaceutical controlled environments. These are being made somewhere either in Mexico or somewhere locally that it's not being mixed properly. Therefore sometimes you'll see a user will take that directed quarter and have really no effect at all. But then obviously we've seen too often that somebody does take that quarter and there was enough fentanyl or fentanyls in it to be a lethal dosage. It all depends on, again like I said, the involvement of the subject. But it's a very affordable drug and it's a very effective drug. So it's not uncommon for someone experimenting to put down a hundred bucks and to obtain 10 pills, which essentially could last them a 40 day supply of pills.

Speaker 6:

At the end of the day, to us, it's about money. When you have a drug that it is highly addictive and highly effective at getting their client to that high state that they want, they're going to make money. And so through whatever means, a lot of that we see through social media, it normalizes drug use. In that normalizing, I feel like it removes some moral objections that a drug dealer would have. Sometimes we are seeing that drug dealers are giving a pharmaceutical warning when they are selling drugs. It's like when we go to a pharmacy and you meet the pharmacist and they tell you essentially how to use that drug. Sometimes we are coming across that. However, it's more often that we don't. And then as different avenues in just the sheer availability of the drug, you're getting more people that are getting involved in distribution of drugs that otherwise would not have the ability to or shouldn't be a part of that group. I see that being the main issue is because it's being distributed to people that otherwise would have no involvement in that sort of world.

Chris Gray:

But the cheap price point in an incredibly addictive substance and nearly unlimited supply. Drug dealers are primed to prey directly on teenagers in plain sight. Enter in the social media problem, an on-demand black market for illegal and deadly drugs.

Speaker 6:

That is one of the major avenues that we seize, is through social media. It's being made and again, talking about normalizing it. It's dramatically changed investigative techniques, it's dramatically changed the drug world and it's constantly evolving too. You have social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat that condition users, especially youth, to look at drugs in a casual manner. What that does is it, they're constantly immersed with their friends, acquaintances and strangers that are using the illicit substances. It really does normalize a behavior that we looked at historically is a very dangerous thing,

Chris Gray:

Which of the social media platforms is most pervasive when it comes to selling drugs?

Speaker 6:

Snapchat really allows a perfect foundation for someone to sell drugs on. Its messages that are sent and then other when they're read, essentially disappear. Same with stories. I know Snapchat has taken a proactive approach to deal with these sort of things, and I won't comment to in detail on it as not to provide too much information, but I know specifically that Snapchat has. And it's constantly though evolving. Our investigative techniques evolve to a certain level but then you have a drug dealer who figures out a new way, in a backdoor approach. That's essentially what it is. It's constantly back and forth with these investigations.

Scotty Sandow:

Can you share with us what an illegal transaction might look like on Snapchat?

Speaker 6:

Yeah. So you have different relationships that are established on Snapchat. You have your localized one that you have your local kid that goes to a school or your local subject that's known to the area that has

that friend base. At that point what they can do, essentially is post like a menu. A menu of what they're willing to sell. If they're available to drive the product to the subject or if they're not mobile, as well as a price list. In addition to that, then you have geographic areas. What we're finding quite often is that drug dealers are entering our communities by posting a geographical story. They're tagging it, say to the gallery [inaudible 00:13:32]. Then anyone who's on that social media platform can view public stories that are posted tagged to the gallery [inaudible 00:13:41]. At that point, someone looks it up, they see the menu, and then at that point they can begin having a direct communication with that dealer.

Chris Gray:

And what makes this epidemic even more challenging? Drug dealers have learned to use social media to cover their tracks.

Speaker 6:

Someone who otherwise, say resides in Sacramento County and deals drugs in Sacramento County, can come to Placer County, have no involvement or no connection other than that they sell drugs and drive through Placer County. And they can post essentially a menu on a social media platform. Then what they can do is they can arrange drug deals through that social media platform. And it really gives the supplier the power to be picky about who they sell drugs to as well as it also allows them to vet customers before they essentially meet face to face. A customer would not know the subject's name, they would not know the appearance, the whereabouts and where that drug is being supplied from. They're acquiring this drug that they... And from someone who they have no idea who it is other than they have a menu posted online.

Speaker 6:

I think due as well to the accessibility that... Every youth on their phone is going to have social media platforms. You combine that with the accessibility to get these illicit substance, you see a dramatic increase and we've seen a dramatic increase in substance abuse when it comes to youth. Nearly any drug at this point can be purchased online. We are constantly working with social media platforms to have dealers, to investigate them and to have them removed from the platforms, but it's an uphill battle. When you take a youth, when you take youth and you allow them to have access to that and in something that should be trustworthy, it's hard for us to keep up with.

Chris Gray:

Illegally manufactured fentanyl sold on the street can come in many forms, including powder, eyedrops, nasal spray, transdermal patch and counterfeit pills, like the one taken by Zach Didier that robbed him of his life.

Speaker 6:

The pills that we're intercepting on the street, obviously fentanyl in itself and the fentanyl analog that we come across are going to be some form of fentanyl. However, the pill based, I would say it's probably up north of 90% of the pills that we're acquiring on the street are processed with that contains some sort of fentanyl or fentanyl analogs. We just don't see the availability of pills that we're acquiring is too hard to be legitimately pharmaceutical. Your main two pills that we're seeing out there are going to be your alprazolam, so your Xanax pills. And those are going to be shaped either in your bars or the little football shaped pills. Or your Percocet, so your M30s. Those are going to be your main two pills that you're going to be seeing in your schools and in this community of Plaster County.

Chris Gray:

Zach Didier thought the pill he bought on Snapchat was a Percocet, but it wasn't a Percocet. It was a fake pill made with fentanyl. As with any drug related death, the Placer County Coroner's Office was called into action to manage the heartbreaking process of investigating the cause of Zach's death.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

The Didier's, I actually cared for their son. I was the responding coroner investigator for his passing. I was there to walk them through that process. And the process is not an easy one and it's not what I would wish upon any family. His passing was extremely sudden and his case was one of the cases where you don't particularly have an idea of why someone passed away. He was young, perfect health, smart, doing everything. A kid should be getting ready for college and all of a sudden his life is ripped away from his family. Those cases are probably some of the harder ones that our office goes out to. And unfortunately they're becoming more and more common for us. Plus on the death industry side of things, we get into the death industry, we work in the death industry for specific reasons. But dealing with the tragedy over and over again, it doesn't particularly get easier.

Scotty Sandow:

And just like with Zach, oftentimes there are few to no signs of fentanyl use.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

There are other cases where there is nothing and we will get a tox report and be utterly shocked that fentanyl is related to that passing it's usually because someone utilized the drugs and there's no evidence of it. Family, no one's aware that they're actually using some type of drug.

Chris Gray:

The fentanyl epidemic isn't just a problem in Placer County. Our neighbors in Sacramento County made a startling discovery about recovered, illegally made drugs.

Sgt. Ty Conners:

The Sac County, when they... They test every... When they have these type of arrests, they actually do a lab test on these pills to make sure what it is and with Percocet... And he asked the one of the lab people, he goes, "How often do you find actual Percocet." And it's been years. Every single one of them has been fake. So that was an eye opener of the fact that these kids and just adults or users think that they're getting an actual Percocet pill when they're not. It just shows how much the industry, the cartel industry, has pushed into our world and can completely fake.

Speaker 6:

We're constantly also working in conjunction with neighboring agencies and also federal agencies as well to keep up on the trends, the use, the appearance, everything that involves from a user to a dealer. Obviously like this, one pill kills. We're increasing the public awareness to it. And just getting the knowledge out there that gone are the days are that parents are used to of just experimental drugs. Because these drugs are not real and they're all fake and they're out on the street. And like I said, Placer County is not excluded from that epidemic. Really, just getting out there in the community and showing awareness to the youth, working with, specifically in Placer County, working with our school resource officers and just being available for questioning.

Chris Gray:

SROs have the unique responsibility to talk with students and staff, offering guidance and assistance as well as providing on-campus intervention. Here again is Sergeant Ty Connors.

Sgt. Ty Connors:

We have full assigned SROs to like I said the four different high schools. He had Colfax High School, Foresthill High School, Del Oro and Granite Bay. Granite Bay is run actually by Roseville Unified School District but it's in the county so we actually work with that district but have one of our SROs assigned to it. Right now, we are running a little short on SROs with some vacancies so we're having to do some shared like Colfax and Foresthill, they're part time. They're doing elementary schools plus doing the high school.

Sgt. Ty Connors:

But when we're fully staffed that's their assignment, is actually that school. They actually have an office on campus. They basically work kind of a nine 80. So they're there most of the week during school hours. And they're there to be that source for the school administration, that liaison between the Sheriff's Office and the schools. And they're there also to handle any type of criminal activity that may occur at the schools, some disruptions and stuff like that. But obviously having them on campus is also another way for kids to outreach if they have a problem or need someone to talk to or say... The biggest thing we've been trying to push is see something, say something. And if they have a school resource officer on campus, it makes it that much easier.

Sgt. Ty Connors:

He elementary school's a little different. There's so many of them. They do these touch and gos. They go to all the different schools. All the schools know who their elementary school resource officer is so that way they have a direct connect with them and they give them a call if they need anything.

Scotty Sandow:

It can be hard to recognize when someone is taking fentanyl or might even be dying from fentanyl poisoning. Our undercover detective offers some tips to help catch the warning signs.

Chris Gray:

What should parents be on the look for when it comes to signs and symptoms of fentanyl poisoning or if they suspect their child is using drugs?

Speaker 6:

I would say the first thing you want to look for is the physical symptoms that someone's either using opiates. Those are going to be your normal symptoms of any sort of misuse of an opiate, which would be any sort of confusion, euphoria, extra relaxation, sleeping more than normal, drowsiness. Like I said, dizziness, nausea, vomiting. Pay attention to their pupils, how they're constricting when you introduce to light and not. And then obviously any sort of respiratory distress.

Speaker 6:

In addition to that, you also want to look for, as a parent, you want to look for any signs of withdrawal. So I know it's hard [inaudible 00:23:23], but irritability, shakiness, diarrhea, any sort of the goosebumps

type of, really suffering and having a hard time making it through the day, not having an appetite. That is more of an extreme case when they develop a dependency on opiates. But pay attention to those signs.

Speaker 6:

And then in addition to that, I would say be current on what your child is doing online. Obviously Snapchat in that app in particular makes it a little difficult to look at historical conversations that are being had. But pay attention who their friends are, who they associate with. Look for specific terminology that's being used. If they're using certain terminology, verbally, some street names for the drugs.

Chris Gray:

They call them Zany bars as the Xanax. That's one terminology that kind of like the street lingo, I guess. They call it is Zany bars is one for the Xanax. Percocet is the other one they're called blue M30s so they're either called blues or M30s is another slang term for that Percocet type pill. And those are the two major ones that they've been dealing with the fentanyl.

Speaker 6:

If they're constantly have to ask for money over and over again, where seemingly they're not acquiring any products as a result of that money. And just, I would say, be upfront with the trends that they're seeing and the amount of deaths that actually are occurring from opiates. Don't be afraid to talk about how many people are dying from opiates. And then also the long lasting effects that something that starts off as an experiment for fun can turn into a lifelong addiction that never goes away really.

Scotty Sandow:

Our health and human services department provides our Sheriff's Office and all other local law enforcement agencies with Naloxone also known as Narcan, a medication that can reverse an opioid overdose if administered in time.

Sgt. Ty Conners:

Narcan's a big thing, it's really helped save lives. Our homeless liaison deputies use them quite often with a lot of our homeless population that have done some of these overdoses. And it's unfortunate that we actually are in this world where even telling parents, buy Narcan, have Narcan in your house, is... If your kid is with their buddies and in their room and they think they're going to do their little thing and what happens if they overdosed in your own home? Do you have the tools to maybe save your kid's life? So having Narcan and stuff like that available. Yeah, you hate to think you have to do it but you hate not have it if it happens.

Chris Gray:

What's your message to parents?

Sgt. Ty Conners:

Be engaged with your kid. Don't think that your kid's not doing something wrong. Yeah, you might think you have that perfect kid but I think for parents to be engaged and be informed of how to be engaged with them. And like I say, with the cell phone use. And we'll do our best to try and push that out to help them.

Sgt. Ty Conners:

With kids, it's simple. Just don't do it. Just don't put the risk of your own life and the life of your... And then the aftermath of your family and everything, just don't do it. It's not worth it. And peer pressure, screw peer pressure. Don't fall to peer pressure. That happens a lot, I think with kids, and I think that it takes a stronger person to say no and to walk away.

Sgt. Ty Conners:

Staying active as a community. We can only see what we can see and we have our challenges in law enforcements. Because it is a lot of what we're seeing is done through social media and is being done on the black market. And so as with most everything, with all crime, we can only see what's in front of us. So be the eyes and the ears for law enforcement. When you see something that doesn't make sense, when you see something that you have questions about, don't be afraid to contact law enforcement, don't be afraid. And that goes as simple as if you're seeing even friends of your children, local houses that have, it seem like a lot of heavy traffic, report that to law enforcement so to allow us to do our job.

Sgt. Ty Conners:

We're there for the kids we're there. And also the administrators too, to help guide them in some of these situations. We're there for them. And I just really want the kids to feel comfortable. We're there to listen. We're not there to judge or anything like that. If you need some help, you ask for it. But also we're there to do our job too and to make the school as safe as possible. And if that means that you get arrested because you got caught doing something stupid, we're going to do it. We're not going to take away from that.

Chief Deputy Coroner Nicole Moynier:

When we compare these to the other passings that we see, these are so unexpected. To be honest, most of our, I hate saying this, but our regular drug users, they have a very solid understanding of sometimes 30 plus years of drug use. Tossing this into it, it's sad to see them passing as well. They are experiencing that just as much as our younger population is. It's not very specific to age range. It is everyone in the community that suffers because of these passings. All the way from the person trying to experiment in high school to my normal drug user that I've encountered quite a bit because we are law enforcement. We see it on both. And that's kind of where the tragedy is, is no one knows what they are encountering or ingesting and it is unfortunately taking the lives of a lot of people throughout the entire community. Be it upper middle class, homeless transient, in between homes. It really doesn't matter, it affects everyone.

Scotty Sandow:

It indeed does affect everyone in one of the worst ways imaginable. As the tide of fentanyl related deaths in the US continues to destroy lives.

Chris Gray:

And as you just heard, our Sheriff's Office has a relentless dedication to protect our community, investigate drug related deaths and make arrests.

Scotty Sandow:

And once those arrests are made, those cases are in the hands of our District Attorney's Office and our prosecutors have one clear and direct message for drug dealers: we can and will prosecute you for murder.

Chris Gray:

And for more on that, join us for our next episode with Placer County District Attorney Morgan Gire. Stay tuned.