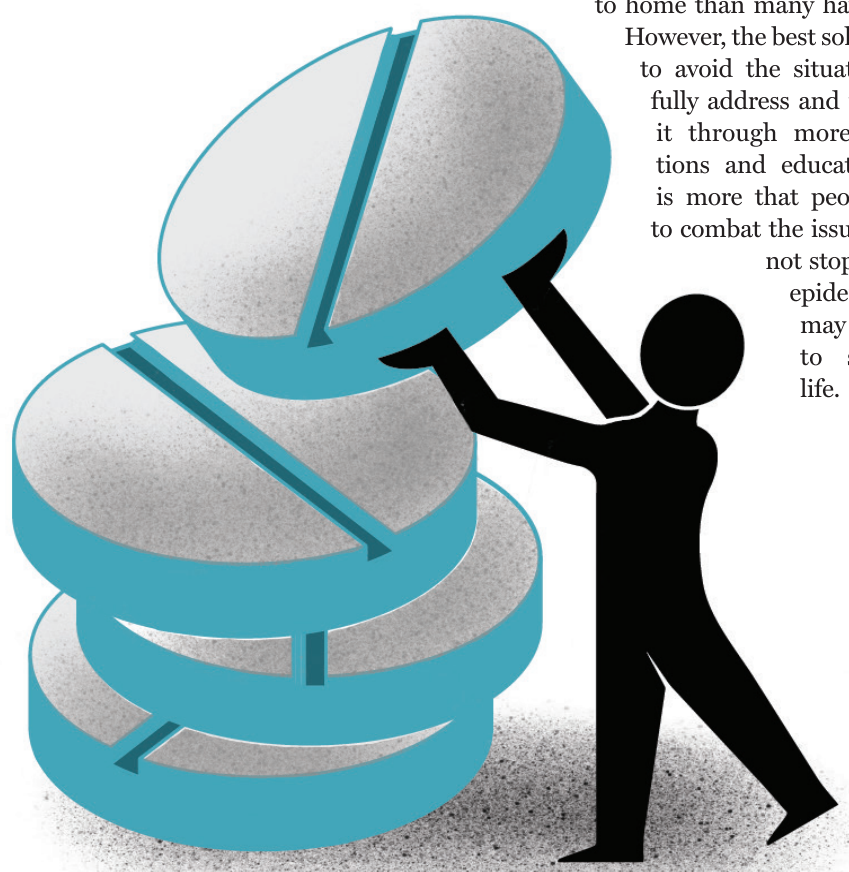


EDITORIAL

Reversing the effect of the opioid overdose epidemic

The Shorthorn Editorial Board encourages people to educate themselves on the opioid epidemic and the university to look into solutions to combat the issue



to home than many have thought. However, the best solution is not to avoid the situation but to fully address and understand it through more conversations and education. There is more that people can do to combat the issue. This will not stop the opioid epidemic, but it may be enough to save one's life.

nessee. Texas' efforts, which have gone from guarding the border to avoid the flow of drugs to focusing on the tasks at hand and embracing more preventive measures, are necessary even if they're only a small step forward in harm reduction when it comes to fentanyl and other opioid-related deaths and addictions.

This year, Senate Bill 867, authored by state Sen. Royce West of Dallas, proposed that opioid antagonists may be provided to emergency medical services personnel, first responders, public schools, community centers and institutions of higher education.

In 2015, Abbott signed into law Senate Bill 1462, which stated that a person who administers an opioid antagonist to another person who's believed to be suffering an opioid-related drug overdose is not subject to criminal prosecution.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board welcomes the bipartisan efforts to combat the opioid overdose epidemic, as it's never too late for lawmakers to actually introduce effective measures as soon as possible.

Hopefully, these efforts will bring to light more education about opioids, and will ensure more people are informing themselves on how to combat this issue, whether by learning about naloxone or by contacting their representatives to voice support for proposed bills.

THE ISSUE:
The opioid overdose epidemic is taking over, as the number of deaths has been increasing over the past few years, whether from fentanyl-laced medication or people taking the substance.

WE THINK:
The state is taking stronger measures to combat the issue, and there's more that UTA can do to bring naloxone, an overdose reversal drug, closer to the university community.

TAKE ACTION:
People should educate themselves on the effect of opioids, and the university should consider making naloxone more accessible at all times on campus.

As more opioid-related deaths opioid continue to rise, Texas lawmakers are making needed efforts to combat this issue, which UTA also should consider joining.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board believes the opioid epidemic is growing among university students, whether from accidentally taking fentanyl-laced pills or taking more than the prescribed dosage to handle stress. However, there are solutions that politicians and the UTA administration have already looked into and should continue to do so, such as medications to reverse the overdose effect, to resist the growing numbers of overdose victims.

The opioid epidemic

Opioids, classified as drugs used to reduce pain, can be found from prescriptions such as oxycodone, morphine and methadone to treat moderate to severe pains, to fentanyl or heroin. The epidemic started in the '90s when an increase in prescribing opioids, specifically OxyContin, triggered a first wave of deaths after pharmaceutical companies lied about its addictiveness, according to the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

There were an estimated 80,816 Opioid-related deaths nationwide in 2021, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to the Texas Health and Human Services, 1,672 people died from fentanyl overdoses in the state in the same year.

Despite beliefs that opioid overdose tends to happen to younger people, data shows that among the death tolls, the victims can range in age, and no specific range is more represented. No factor can predict if a person will become addicted to drugs, but there are a few factors — biology, environment and development — that can lead to it and make it happen to anyone.

However, professors and scientists have said that for adults ages 18 to 45, opioid-related overdose is likely the leading cause of death, according to Politifact.

Students need to educate themselves on the types of available opioids, especially considering that many prescribed medications for mental health contain opioids.

Adderall is the most commonly used medication for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children and adults. However, doses being sold on the streets and the internet have recently been laced with fentanyl, which is proven to be addictive and possibly deadly.

Fentanyl is an opioid that is 50 to 100 times more potent than heroin and morphine, and a lethal dose can be as small as 2 mg, which is the size of a sesame seed, said Melissa McCarthy, director of Prevention Programming at Challenge of Tarrant County, which is dedicated to confronting substance abuse, in an email.

It's important for people to understand the impact of the opioid epidemic and how to prevent it.

Parents should also discuss the topic with their children, whether it's about the potential side effects and hazards of opioids or about how easy it is to overdose. There are solutions to save someone who's potentially overdosing and to reverse the situation.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board encourages people to learn more about the opioid epidemic and realize that the situation is closer

What the Texas government is doing

This year, during the 88th Texas Legislative Session, there has been a bipartisan effort from Texas lawmakers to combat opioid overdoses, as many bills are being introduced regarding the issue, whether to provide free overdose medication and prevention training or to legalize fentanyl test strips, which are used to detect the presence of fentanyl in different kinds of drugs.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board believes that such efforts from both sides of the aisle may signal hope for serious changes that can educate and protect Texans. The opioid epidemic has reached Texas and is growing more dangerous each year. As citizens lack resources and advice from the government, any small steps from the state to educate and ensure safeness are welcomed.

In the current legislative session, lawmakers will be working on Senate Bill 86, which would remove the penalty for those who manufacture, possess, deliver or use testing equipment for identifying fentanyl. Currently, possession of drug testing supplies is punishable by a \$500 fine, and distribution of drug testing supplies is punishable by up to a year in jail, according to *The Texas Tribune*.

In the past, many Republican lawmakers have opposed laws written by Democrats, such as syringe exchanges, because they believed it would encourage drug use. But in December, Gov. Greg Abbott and other Republicans have expressed support for legalizing fentanyl test strips, as many medications are proven to be laced with synthetic opioids.

Abbott also said last October that the state should begin funding the distribution of Narcan, a drug that reverses and blocks the effects of opioids, including fentanyl. Narcan, also known as naloxone, is available in two forms: prefilled nasal spray and injectable.

The overdose reversal drug, which has been administered mostly by first responders and emergency personnel, was recently recommended to be safely and effectively used in the over-the-counter setting, according to a report by the Food and Drug Administration in February.

This is a welcome change of tone from Republican lawmakers regarding their perspectives on drug use policies and prevention. Abbott's message that he's willing to support measures to tackle the fentanyl crisis may be the biggest "go-ahead" for the House and Senate to begin drafting bills for the issue, now that they won't be vetoed.

In recent years, more states have legalized fentanyl test strips, including Republican-dominated ones, such as Wyoming, Nebraska, South Carolina, Alabama and Ten-

UTA harm reduction plan

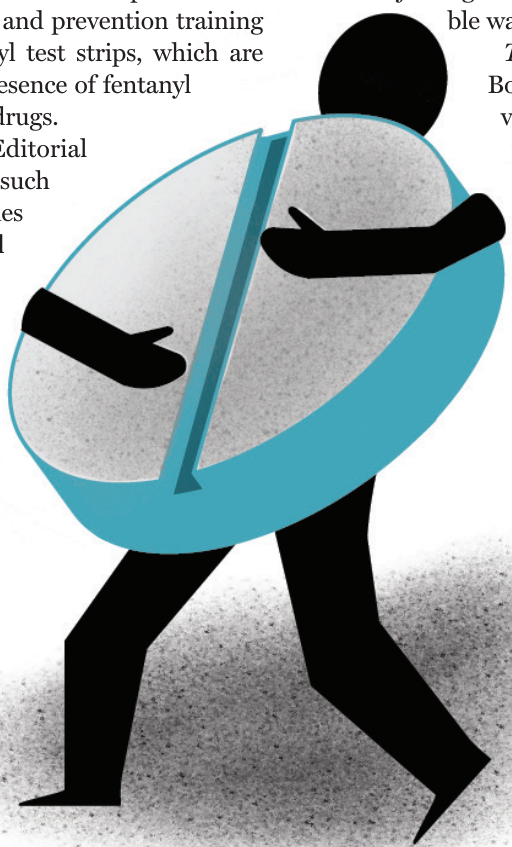
Amid politicians furthering the use of Narcan to treat opioid overdoses, UTA should consider joining this effort in multiple possible ways.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board encourages the university to consider expanding naloxone availability on campus. Currently, the UTA community can only get access to Narcan through Health Services, which only opens from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday, said Claudia Perkins in an email. Perkins is the program director of the SMART UTA Drug and Alcohol Awareness Coalition, which promotes responsible, educated decision-making concerning the overall health and wellness for the university community.

"We have been working directly with multiple departments across the Campus and the UTA JED Committee to encourage having Naloxone available at key locations throughout the campus, such as the library, UC, residence halls, College Park Center, the MAC and also as part of all UTA PD officer's personal equipment," Perkins said.

Because the Health Services only operate during business hours, it's difficult for students to access naloxone at their convenience. With midterms coming up, which creates much pressure and stress, and the potential of students attending parties during Spring Break that may lead to drug use, it's vital that the university should start considering making naloxone more accessible.

Since 2020, the UT System has established



a manual outlining guidelines and procedures governing the use of Narcan kits and epinephrine auto-injectors. The system's police may provide emergency assistance to any person who appears or is believed to suffer from an opioid-related overdose, opioid-related exposure or anaphylaxis, according to the manual.

In 2022, the UT System began allowing students to ask a staff person for access to Narcan on campus at 24-hour residence hall front desks and at the security desk in the library for free without revealing their names or other information.

By October, UT Austin had run out of its Narcan supply twice. While the university did not disclose the number of people who used the drug, this signaled Narcan's effectiveness and necessity among the student population.

At UT Health San Antonio, while it may take up to 35 to 45 days to receive free Narcan due to increasingly high demand, students can still order it for free using a single request form with the university.

There are other efforts from other institutions within the UT System that UTA may consider applying. Since the campus police are one of the few authorities that can break into an apartment in case of overdose emergencies, the university should consider beginning the training process with them to ensure the safety of students.

In addition, the university should also consider partnering with organizations to bring students more training on administering Narcan on campus. While the process only takes minutes, it's been proven to help extend the response time to the overdose before the person is taken to the hospital.

However, bringing Narcan to campus may have its disadvantages, as students may use it as an excuse to relax precautions and be careless about drug use. But that is not enough of a reason to not supply naloxone on campus in other emergencies, such as when people may not have known about the severity of opioids or if they've unknowingly consumed fentanyl-laced opioids.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board recommends that UTA consider all these factors and start bringing Narcan closer to the university community and having it more accessible at all hours. The opioid epidemic is real. And if there's a potential solution to the situation, the university should take advantage of it.

The Shorthorn Editorial Board is made up of editor-in-chief Dang Le; news editor Steven Shaw; Jonathan Perriello, life and entertainment editor; sports editor Isaac Appelt; design editor Claudia Humphrey; copy editor Chris Huddleston and engagement producer Roulette Hendricks. Hendricks was not present for this editorial decision, and multimedia editor Christine Vo filled in.

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