

DRUG OVERDOSE DEVASTATES YORK FAMILY

Parents: 'Trust your gut, know your kid'

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The parents of a Keswick youth, who died from an accidental overdose of the prescription drug Fentanyl, are trying to prevent their own personal tragedy from happening to other families.

"We felt the need to share this information to spread awareness and inform those who may be in situations that may tempt them to try Fentanyl," says Monica Lockie, whose 21-year-old son, Cole, died Feb. 28 after abusing a powerful prescription drug used to treat people with serious or chronic pain.

"A lot of families keep these things hush-hush and I just didn't feel that was right," she added. "Hopefully, by bringing more awareness to this dangerous and emerging trend of Fentanyl abuse, it may stop other lives from being lost."

Running her fingers over a gold charm her son designed as his signature stamp at the end of a gold link chain and surrounded by the comfort of a home reflecting all the hallmarks of a loving and supportive family, Mrs. Lockie bravely lays bare the details of her son's last days, his struggle with mental health issues, such as anxiety and drug addiction, while advocating for changes to the mental health system and awareness of Fentanyl abuse.

Mrs. Lockie and her husband, Greg, were surprised to discover a drug they hadn't even heard of and what's known as "patch abuse" has now, apparently, become a major problem.

One hundred times more powerful than morphine, street names for the drug include Apache, China girl, China white, dance fever, friend, goodfella, jackpot, murder 8, TNT, as well as Tango and Cash, according to addiction and abuse websites.

While Mrs. Lockie readily and frankly admits her eldest son had problems abusing drugs throughout high school, she honestly believes his use of the patch was his first and, tragically, last time.

Evidence suggests Cole may have obtained the drug from a roommate, who was legally prescribed the patch, which contains 72 hours of time-released medication.

Even after it is used, dangerous levels of the drug remain on the



Monica Lockie holds her son, Cole's, pendant that he designed and surrounds herself with a sea of photographs and memories of him. He overdosed on pentamyl last month. His mother says it is the new Oxycontin and to be aware.

patch, making it valuable to resell or pull out of the garbage for drug users who either ingest, smoke, chew or inhale it.

"This drug is so potent and so dangerous, the kids don't know what they are dealing with," says Mrs. Lockie, whose compassion and love for her son underpins her firm resolve and quiet strength to make a difference for others.

NOTICE SYMPTOMS

With Cole living on his own for the past year, Mrs. Lockie says she can't point to specific signs to alert parents to, but addiction specialists cite physical symptoms such as extreme drowsiness, nodding off, constricted or pinpoint pupils and slurred speech.

"As a parent, you need to trust your gut, because you know your kid," she says. "The biggest thing for parents is to educate yourself. We were able to tell when Cole was on something and when he wasn't."

For the "free spirit" — intelligent, creative, open, honest, artis-

tic and expressive — the realization his battle with addictions was bigger than him never came, says Mrs. Lockie.

"He thought he could navigate his way around it and control it," she says, adding Cole displayed a new resolve to get his life back on track and be a father to his three-year-old daughter only two days before his death, when the family saw him for the last time.

But Mrs. Lockie is also "disappointed" in a mental health system that, in her opinion, doesn't do enough.

"We, as a society, need to take a good and hard look at how we can fix our system."

Assessments in elementary school deemed her creative, intelligent, inquisitive child with warm brown eyes and mop of chocolate hair as suffering from low self-esteem and high anxiety.

Not long after, the class clown always looking for a way to fit in and be accepted found a new way to "feel like a king" through drug

use, she said.

But when the dabbling turned to addiction and subsequent rounds of Narcotics Anonymous, mental assessments, court appearances, case workers and recommendations, Mrs. Lockie wonders why more supports weren't available to ensure "mental fitness" after a diagnosis.

"He was in front of so many people who could have helped him," she says.

"He had all of the assessments, all of the recommendations and what happened? Where's the follow up? You can only do so much as a parent, especially when your child is legally an adult. If we really classify addiction as a disease, then our system is broken."

There was a year-long waiting list to get a hospital-appointed psychiatrist and the family was turned away from a new facility in Toronto because Cole was not suicidal, she adds.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you suspect your child is doing drugs, contact:

► Ontario Drug & Alcohol Helpline at 1-800-565-8603

► Addiction Services for York Region at 905-841-7007, intake co-ordinator at 905-841-7007 or 1-800-263-2288, ext. 322 or go to asyr.ca

► Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services, Southlake Regional Health Centre at 905-895-4521, ext. 2976

► Canadian Mental Health Association, York Region branch, administrative office: 905-853-8477 or 1-866-208-5509

► yorkregion@cmha-yr.on.ca or www.cmha-yr.on.ca, Addiction Services 1-800-263-2288

► Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at 1-800-463-6273 or camh.ca

"You either have to be in immediate crisis and then go to emergency and see if you can be deemed in a psychotic episode, so you can get treatment right away, or you're waiting a year for a psychiatrist," she says.

"It's not right. We work out, we eat right, but how do we teach our kids to be mentally fit? Where do we teach them coping strategies? It can start at home, but most of us aren't educated enough to deal with issues like anxiety and depression."

NOT EDUCATED

Still reeling from the fact her son will never walk through the front door again, Mrs. Lockie smiles through her tears when she talks of the impact he left on those around him.

"We can't change what happened but, maybe, some good can come out of it," she says.

Perhaps then, Cole will have left his signature stamp on many more people.

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