

# Local mother makes it her mission to spread awareness about illicit fentanyl

Published 7:32 am Wednesday, November 1, 2023

By **Holly Jackson**

Allen Michael “Mikey” Boyd had a “heart of gold” and loved interacting with people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities. He was a “beautiful soul with a free spirit” who loved his younger brothers, spending time with friends and skateboarding, his mother, Allena Hale, shares with groups of people she meets at events that raise awareness about the dangers of illicit fentanyl use.

Hale, of Pamlico Beach, lost Boyd to fentanyl poisoning on March 31, 2022 when he was just 22 years old.

Through her work, she hopes to educate people and comfort grieving families who have similar stories of young family members that were kind, smart and funny but met untimely deaths.

## What is Fentanyl?

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Pharmaceutical-grade fentanyl is used by medical professionals to treat patients with severe pain, and is used to treat patients with chronic pain who are “physically more tolerant to other opioids.”

When fentanyl is produced illegally, it is dropped on blotter paper, smoked, snorted/sniffed or made into pills that look similar to other opioids, per the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Fentanyl is inexpensive to make, potent and highly addictive. It is often mixed with other illicit drugs such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine and MDMA to increase their strength. Fentanyl pills can look identical to prescription opioids but contain a lethal amount of the drug. Which means, anyone taking an illicit pill may not know there is a lethal amount of fentanyl mixed in.

The amount of fentanyl it takes to have an effect on a person is about the same amount it takes to kill them which is why it is so closely monitored in a medical setting, according to Song for Charlie, a national family-run nonprofit charity that raises awareness about illegal fentanyl pills.

According to the DEA, two milligrams of fentanyl can be fatal depending on a person’s weight, tolerance and past usage. They have found counterfeit pills ranging from .02 to 5.1 milligrams of fentanyl per tablet.

Hale’s son is one of 36,000 North Carolinians who have died from overdose or fentanyl poisoning from 2000-2022, according to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

A rise of overdose deaths in North Carolina is the result of illegally manufactured fentanyl.

“In 2021, more than 77% of overdose deaths in the state likely involved fentanyl, often in combination with other substances,” the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services reported.

The effects of taking fentanyl include: relaxation, euphoria, pain relief, sedation, confusion, drowsiness, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, urinary retention, pupillary constriction and respiratory depression.

A poisoning of fentanyl can cause stupor, changes in pupil size, clammy skin, bluish skin, coma and respiratory failure leading to death, per the DEA.

If you suspect a friend or loved one may be showing signs of a fentanyl poisoning, Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina suggests – stay with the person, use your knuckles to rub their upper lip or chest, call 911, lay the person on their back and administer Narcan in one nostril and turn the person on their side in case of vomiting or choking. If there is no response after two minutes, apply Narcan again. Begin CPR chest compressions while waiting for first responders.

## Fentanyl in Beaufort County

The Beaufort County Department of Public Health reported that in 2021, there were more than 15 unintentional deaths related to medication or overdose. That number was closer to 20 in 2017. There were 16 deaths related to heroin or fentanyl in 2021, but 15 deaths in 2017. No other years came close to those amounts. From 2017-2021 county residents between 25-44 were most likely to experience an overdose.

The Beaufort County Sheriff’s Office shared that since January 1, 2023, there have been 49 fentanyl related arrests in the county.

“These arrests have resulted in over (200) grams of powdered fentanyl and over (400) fentanyl pills off the streets,” the sheriff’s office shared. “These seizures by deputies are enough fentanyl to potentially kill well over 100,000 people. Our Office works with other local, state and federal agencies to try and combat the import of fentanyl and other dangerous drugs into Beaufort County. These arrest statistics are a direct result of aggressive enforcement by our Patrol Division and Drug Unit.”

One of the most tragic occurred in April when a 28-year-old male was charged with felony Death by Distribution in connection to the death of a four-year-old girl in Aurora. A month prior, the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined the child died from Fentanyl Toxicity.

**Advocacy and Action**

Since her son's death, Hale has worked tirelessly to research illicit fentanyl and spread awareness about its effects on people and their loved ones. She said groups like the ones she volunteers with now helped her grieve and know that she is not alone.

"I started researching and I found these groups. I found mothers that had been in the same situation, because I felt like I was the only person that this had ever happened to...I immediately wanted to do something to try to get the word out and talk to people about it," Hale said.

Her motivation to speak about illicit fentanyl is her own experience. Prior to her son's death, she did not know about it and now doesn't want other families to learn about the drug after the fact.

"I just felt compelled, because if I didn't know about it how many other people didn't know about it. I can't live with myself not speaking out, not helping somebody who has went through that same situation," Hale said.

Part of her work includes going to Town Hall meetings hosted by the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office to share her son's story. Hale believes that if more people know about fentanyl and its potentially fatal risks, then better prevention efforts can be created and implemented.

"I can't do anything to bring my son back, but I can help other people know what to look for. I can tell them about fentanyl and how it's affected my life and my family," Hale said.

Hale also works with both the Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina and the Eastern NC Chapter of Forgotten Victims of Fentanyl – North Carolina.