

A two-sided coin: rappers connection to opioids

By Jeremiah Pearson

During every era there is something that every generation does that trends a lot. In this day it is Opioids that is the trend for a lot of people and some people blame the cause for inappropriate use of the drugs on emo rappers. In 2018 the Justice Department blames them for many deaths due to different opioid drugs. The New York Police Department special agent in charge James J Hunt said, "This investigation led us into the underbelly of emo rap and its' glorification of opioid use." Lil peep, an emo rapper who died from fentanyl and Xanax overdose in November of 2018, talks a lot about the use of opioids in his music.

More recently rapper Mac Miller died. According to an article on Turnbridge.com called, "What did Mac Miller Overdose on and Why?" said, "It was not necessarily a lethal amount of one drug that caused him to overdose. Rather, it was a combination of substances. Mac Miller overdosed on a deadly mix of cocaine and fentanyl, and with alcohol in his system, as well."

Local country artist Jon King agrees with the fact that many artists in this generation cause many young people to use opioids. "Rap music is not the same any more they talk about stuff that harms this generation instead on motivating," said King.

He went on to talk about the late 90s rapper The Notorious B.I.G. "What Biggie rapped about was getting money and motivating yourself to do better," said King.

King also thinks rappers like J Cole and Kendrick Lamar are talking about change and growth. "J Cole and Kendrick Lamar are great rappers as a whole. They don't talk about using drugs, but the opposite," said King.

While King believes that some rap music and opioids are correlated, many others think differently. Josh Vasquez, who listens to all types of music, does not think it is the rappers' fault for the correlation. "There are so many other factors of why people take opioids and to blame rappers is not fair," said Vasquez. He explains that a lot of people get addicted at a young age due to doctors and what they pre-scribe. "As far as kids and teenagers taking drugs, it's easy to get addicted, that's why I feel just as alcohol and tobacco has an age limit, certain drugs shouldn't be prescribed to people under a certain age," said Vasquez.

The Website WebMD says there is a difference between tolerance and addiction. "Tolerance is after taking opioid pain medication for a while, you

might find that you need more and more of the drug to achieve the same effect in easing pain. Whereas addiction is when you use opioid medication over an extended period of time, you can have dependence," said WebMD.

Is rap the main factor in why people take opioids? Can we really blame people for telling stories with music about what they have seen and done?



Local country music artist Jon King

More and more people are turning to CBD over traditional medications, but is it safe?

Jonathan Roberts

As hemp and cannabidiol (CBD) products become increasingly popular, people are turning to them over traditional medications -- especially as the opioid crisis continues to devastate Central Appalachia.

But that might not be advisable, or safe, says one East Tennessee State University professor.

"(Quitting opioids) is one of the many things CBD marketers are adding to list of things CBD can do, and they're doing sort of willy-nilly without a ton of evidence behind it," said Dr. Matthew Palmatier, who teaches a course on cannabinoids and their effect on the brain at ETSU.

Still, the hemp industry is budding, and over a dozen dispensaries have opened in the Tri-Cities alone over the past two years -- not counting the numerous businesses that offer CBD products as add-ins for products such as coffee, smoothies and teas.

"We see a lot of arthritic patients coming in, that and anxiety are probably the two big ones that we see -- a lot of times people (using opioids) have to keep upping their dose, but with this, you don't. It's all-natural, and it's a lot better, healthier," said Corbin Bednarczyk, director of sales at East Tennessee Hemp Co.

CBD products, however, are completely unregulated and only one CBD-based product has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration, an anti-seizure medication for children,

Epidiolex.

Regardless of regulation, the CBD industry has turned into a modern-day gold rush, with it expected to become a \$16 billion business by 2025, according to Forbes. As CBD's popularity grows, the higher the risk for people who may not know what they're consuming. Some studies have found that some online products don't contain as much CBD as they claim they do.

In October, the FDA published a list of companies falsifying the amount of CBD that was actually in their products, saying that "it is important to note that these products are not approved by the FDA for the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment or prevention of any disease."

Fortunately for American consumers, more research is on the way. In September, the National Institute of Health announced they would be funding nine studies exploring CBD's actual impact on health issues like anxiety, arthritis and chronic pain.

"The treatment of chronic pain has relied heavily on opioids, despite their potential for addiction and overdose and the fact that they often don't work well when used on a long-term basis," said Dr. Helene Langevin, director of the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, part of the National Institutes of Health, in a statement.



Local hemp shops inventory

The cost? About \$3 million. However, only one study -- done by the University of Utah -- will be testing on people, as the other studies will focus on animals, mostly lab rats and mice. None of the studies use tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive ingredient found in marijuana.

Palmateir sees the studies as a good first step but thinks there needs to be more concrete evidence to support CBD's claims, adding that without further research, he'd be hesitant to suggest anyone turn to CBD over traditional medication.

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