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Letter to the Editor: Virgin Islanders Are Not Immune to Fentanyl Epidemic

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We are not immune to this increasing threat to public safety, our youth, and the general public.

Dear Editor,

There is an increasing threat that is an epidemic stateside, and as close as Puerto Rico, affecting thousands each year. We in the U.S. Virgin Islands have been fortunate thus far to be not directly affected, but that will not last forever. We as Virgin Islanders often fall prey to what is happening stateside, many times due to the melting pot we are. Just like gangs, dress trends, music, food, and many others, we replicate trends stateside, some not in our best interest. We, as Virgin Islanders, in my opinion, should be more independent by taking the good, and leaving the bad, unfortunately, that is not always how it works.

The threat/epidemic I am speaking about is overdose cases/deaths by numerous means involving fentanyl and other dangerous drugs. Last year alone there were approximately 106,000 drug overdose deaths in the United States. Fentanyl, one of the main causes, is a powerful opioid drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration used as a pain medication, and together with other medications, for anesthesia. It is 100 times more potent than morphine, and 50 times more potent than heroin. It was originally developed in 1959 and introduced in the 1960's as an intravenous anesthetic. Analogues or synthetic fentanyl is being produced in China and Mexico (and United States) and is making its way to the United States and other countries at an alarming rate. It is being used as a recreational drug and is being mixed with heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and others. Recently there has been an increase in overdose deaths involving marijuana that is found to be laced with fentanyl. It is deadly, and if naloxone (Narcan) is not readily available, there is a very high probability that death will occur. One kilogram of fentanyl can make approximately 500,000 pills. Each pill, in most cases, can kill the user. Again, without naloxone, death is a probability. Last year alone the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) along with other Law Enforcement seized enough fentanyl to kill every American. That is an alarming thought.

We, the people of the Virgin Islands need to understand that this is not a "stateside" issue alone, this is our issue too. Our youth need to be aware of the potential ramifications of "experimenting" with drugs. The DEA has a program they are promoting called "One Pill Can Kill"! The words mean exactly that, its just not worth taking that chance. Peer pressure, not knowing how to say "no", or just going with the flow can result in death or serious injury. Again, even marijuana is being laced with fentanyl. It is not a secret that marijuana is being imported practically daily into the Virgin Islands. It is not a secret that the same marijuana is being sold to people who believe they are purchasing controlled grown and packaged marijuana. It is just a matter of time before we experience what is occurring stateside where numerous people will overdose, and God forbid, die as a result of either intentionally placed fentanyl or somehow contaminated with fentanyl marijuana. First Responders are also becoming victims. There is an increase of overdose cases involving police and others who come in contact with various substances that contain fentanyl. No one is immune to this growing epidemic.

There is another concern we need to be aware of. There are cases where people, and some establishments locally, are distributing pills, prescription and other, for recreational purposes. Again, like I stated earlier, "One Pill Can Kill"! The pills are being passed as oxycontin, vicodin, demerol, valium, Xanax, Ritalin, Adderall, and many others. These pills are brought in to the Virgin Islands to be sold to customers who believe that they are purchasing what is being told to them. Again, its just a matter of time before a batch of fentanyl laced pills or fentanyl pills themselves cause overdose cases and deaths. The pills are being made to look exactly like prescription, or even over the counter pills. Again, "One Pill Can Kill"!

Another threat I want to bring to the forefront is the potential for "date rapes" for unsuspecting victims. We have cases were rapes occur to unsuspecting victims due to being under the influence of some intoxicating substance. There are some in the community who look for the opportunity to take advantage of people at various functions and bar environments. Again, we in the Virgin Islands are not immune to this. There have been cases where women and men were abused after being made intoxicated either by alcohol or other drugs. Some people can tolerate alcohol more than others. For some, one drink can make them intoxicated, for others it takes more to get to the point of intoxication. Some drugs being added to victim's drinks are gamma-hydroxybutyric (GHB) (usually a liquid), rohypnol (usually a pill) and ketamine (a clear liquid). It is best NOT to leave drinks unattended, and always be aware of your surroundings. Never agree to allow friends/anyone to add anything to your drink. Never agree to take a pill that is offered to you that

will “make you enjoy the function/outing” better. If the person you are with is a true friend, they will not make that offer or contaminate your drink or food item.

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