

design by CAROLINE MAY/in-depth editor

+15 million

people, in the U.S. alone, abuse prescription drugs, more than the combined number who reported abusing cocaine, hallucinogens, inhalants and heroin.

60-70%

of teens say that home medicine cabinets are their source of drugs.

2,500

youth abuse a prescription pain reliever for the first time everyday in the U.S.

50%

of teens believe that prescription drugs are much safer than illegal street drugs.

598,542

of the 1.4 million drug-related emergency room admissions in 2005 were associated with abuse of pharmaceuticals alone or with other drugs.

45%

of overdose deaths are caused by depressants, opioids, and antidepressants.

statistics from www.drugfreeworld.org

One trip could be your last trip

Officials discuss reality of uneducated teen drug use

by **MOLLY CROUCH**
copy editor

He's seen this too many times before.
The empty pill containers.
The immobile, unresponsive teenage body.

He's done this too many times before.
The chest compressions.
Another round of reversal medications.

He's heard this too many times before.
The weeping cries of a mother.
The stony silence of a father.

Dr. Matt Young has been in emergency medicine for 19 years and has dealt with numerous cases of teenage overdoses.
"It's a very disturbing scene for the

caregivers," Young said. "More importantly, it's very disturbing for the loved ones of the patient because most of the time they heard that they were going out to a party or into another room, and the next thing they know, the patient has been put on a ventilator. When young people die, it's just very tragic because the majority of the time, it could have been prevented."

Many teens hope for a quick trip, something that will calm them down or relieve their stress. In a survey collected by drugfreeworld.org, 50 percent of the teenagers believed that prescription drugs are safer than street drugs and that 60-70 percent received the medication from their own homes.

"With prescription drugs, the reason that so many people take these and abuse these is

because they can fit in a pocket and can be concealed," Young said. "You can put that in your pocket and sneak that in and take those at the most convenient time for the person trying to get that artificial high."

Texas and Arkansas now have a state Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) which gives individuals who are authorized under state law to receive the information for purposes of their profession. According to deadiversion.usdoj.gov, the program can "identify or prevent drug abuse

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One choice could be your last choice

by **MOLLY CROUCH**
copy editor

Will was a unique, bright young man, an honor student in the Gifted and Talented Program at Arkansas High.

Will was selected by his teachers to attend Boys' State his junior year.

Will was well-liked and stayed out of trouble during his high school career.

Will graduated in 2013 and chose to experiment with drugs.

Will Autrey was 18 years old when he died of a Tramadol overdose on April 25, 2014.

"I was just shocked," said Debbie Autrey, Will's mother. "A lot of people go through an experimental phase. Teens are going to try things. [With] the dangers in today's world, you may not make it out. My son made a choice. That's what it boils down to: his choices. Unfortunately, he was not one of the ones to make it. I know that if he was here today, he would take it all back for anything."

As a young boy, Will was not the typical child who loved to throw mud and run from girls with cooties. He took Taekwondo in elementary school, which led to his passion for Asian culture. During middle school, Will's serious nature and knowledge of politics captured the attention of his teachers.

"Will Autrey knew more about politics than anyone I've ever known; that was his passion," Debbie said. "When he was in middle school, I would get so mad because he would make me wait until 4 o'clock or 4:30. He would be in [his class] talking to all of his teachers. [They] would be circled around him, talking about politics."

Will soon outgrew Taekwondo, and his interests wandered outside of politics as he entered high school. Will liked to study Judaism and became even more fascinated with Asian culture and how other countries operated.

"I had no problems with Will in high school," Debbie said. "He was just a great kid. Part of the issue with him [was that] he was easily bored. He was one who liked to

dip his toe. You could tell him no, but he wanted to find out for himself."

Debbie noticed Will's charming personality progressively disappearing during July after he graduated up until the end of that year. As Will's once boy-like behavior morphed into an apparition of his former self, Debbie realized there was something wrong. Eventually, Will was asked to move out in late December.

"I confronted him, and, of course, [he said,] 'Mom, I'm not doing anything. Don't bring your work home,'" Debbie said. "He said he didn't want to leave, but it was tough love. Tough love does work. I believe I had my son three months longer than I would have had him had I not used tough love."

Will was back home and was doing great. Will was proud of his mom and held her hand and kissed her cheek at Central Mall. Will's behavior began to change. Will was experimenting again. Will was 24 days away from turning 19 when he died.

"In my generation, we would experiment with things, but people weren't dying," Debbie said. "Now the drugs that are out there, they're astounding. It has nothing to do with how you were raised. Will had a lot going for him. But it came to my home. I'm a statistic now."

Debbie also went through an experimental phase in her teenage and college years, but quickly grew out of it. With the rapid desensitization of drugs, many teenagers and young adults are not aware of how easily Will's mistake can happen.

"He was just experimenting, and he didn't make it out," Debbie said. "Why do some make it out and some don't? I don't know. He didn't want to die. He didn't mean to die. He didn't think he would die."

Debbie is a mother. Debbie has been a therapist at South Arkansas Youth Services for 25 years.

Mother copes with loss of son, hopes to spread awareness of drug dangers

Debbie was close with Will, and they traveled over the years to Mexico, Galveston, Disney World and St. Thomas.

Debbie bought Will a passport two months before he died.

Debbie did all of the right things and taught Will the dangers of drugs, but she still lost her son.

"I'll never be the same," Debbie said. "He was my only child. He died April 25, 2014. The last I knew of me, Debbie Autrey, the way I've always been, was on April 24, 2014. I'll never be that person again."

So now, Debbie hopes to honor Will's life; to make sure that he isn't defined by one decision; and to convince other young people they aren't immune to death.

"People say that it only happens to broken homes," Debbie said. "No, it struck my home. This tragedy came to my home. It can get anybody at any time, any where, any place. Don't ever say it won't happen to you. Don't ever say 'I won't be that stupid, I would never try that.' My son said the same thing, and it boils down to that choice. If you decide to make that choice, you're deciding to play Russian Roulette with your life."

REMEMBERING WILL
Debbie Autrey displays a photo of her son, Will, who died in April of last year.



photo by S. Vaughn

see video story on tigertimesonline.com

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and diversion, facilitate and encourage the identification, intervention with and treatment of persons addicted to prescription drugs.”

“We don’t write a huge amount of prescriptions [in the emergency department,]” Young said. “We will prescribe them enough to get to the follow-up appointment. It’s important for all of us as physicians and physician extenders to take each patient and each individual complaint and make the decision of what’s the best pain medication for this patient. [We] see what other prescriptions have been prescribed and filled [with the database], so it gives us a little insight of abuse potential.”

The database may be a prevention technique to avoid more overdoses, but the eradication of drug abuse is not near. Until then, educating people on the dangers of their medication and illegal drugs is one of the top methods for awareness.

“I think it will help,” Young said. “Is it the cure for it? By no means. The cure for it is the knowledge of the person who is taking the medicine, and also for young adults to understand that these medicines can be deadly.”

Social media has evolved from getting to know distant relatives and catching up with long-lost friends to new ways to access drugs. A quick direct message on Twitter or Facebook now makes it possible for dealers to target younger clients.

“Social media has made a terrible turn,” TISD police officer Brad Irvin said. “It keeps things stirred up. People make things up. The drug part of it is transactions

being made. People are getting connected with each other and, within the drug world, they’re being able to contact our teenagers. It definitely plays a negative effect in this nation.”

Turning on the radio, Tove Lo blares about bad habits and staying high, Lil Wayne and Future spit rhymes about their favorite purple drink on your Pandora or Spotify station and Miley Cyrus is a Happy Hippie on your Instagram feed. Life has become 24/7 drug promotions.

“Our society makes it seem that drugs are glamorous, that it’s OK to do it and that it doesn’t cause problems,” Irvin said. “It does. It causes major problems. I’ve seen it destroy families. It kills brain cells you more than likely won’t get back.”

Prescription pills are not the only worries of many doctors. Marijuana has recently become legal in the states of Colorado, Washington, Alaska and Oregon. This legalization has catapulted its increase in popularity between the teenage and young adult population, but there are many side effects to users’ mental actions and reactions.

“For instance, if you are going to drive, you can have an altered mental status that may be what the people are describing as the high,” Young said. “However, this high also slows their reaction time. They may not see another car pull in front of them, so it makes them more prone to wrecks. It also decreases inhibitions to where they may make better decisions if they’re not on the drug, but, once they do take the drug, they may not make wise decisions.”

A new form of marijuana has surfaced,

known as synthetic marijuana. It’s usually illegally sold over the Internet and is favored by many people because it doesn’t show up on a drug test. Although it doesn’t show up on tests, it has many dangerous side effects: fast heart rate, heart palpitations, arrhythmias, seizures and even death.

“[The] up and coming [drug] is synthetic marijuana,” Young said. “They try to market this as something that looks cool, but it’s an illegal substance. It has nothing to do with synthetic marijuana other than that name. It’s basically a combination of leaves with chemicals poured on them. No one knows how they react to it until they try it. I hope people understand that one use can cause death.”

Synthetic marijuana, or K2, is sold as potpourri, incense and other things that are not for human consumption. With the social need to impress friends, many teenagers only try drugs and synthetics to prove themselves.

“Usually people obtain [synthetic marijuana] over the Internet from friends and peer pressure, then smoke it thinking it’s the same kind of high as illegal marijuana,” Young said. “It’s very unfortunate that it’s usually peer pressure that leads people to this, thinking they’re going to obtain some kind of high. It can be deadly with just one try.”

Not only are there physical dangers to smoking synthetic, but there are also extreme risks to users’ frame of mind. These hazards can include hallucinations and extreme paranoia.

“From the psychiatric standpoint, it

can also make them belligerent and almost in a state of psychosis, which means that they have an altered mental state,” Young said. “They can feel like they have spiders crawling on them. It’s very dangerous. It’s not a substitute for anything.”

Sometimes students will see Charlie, TISD’s drug dog, making its rounds. Students and faculty can place anonymous tips on the TISD Police Department’s website or simply tell officers. Punishment for possession of drugs while on campus is DAEP and being an arrested by police.

“When people do tell us tips, their name is never brought up. We do not want any retaliation, nor will we tolerate that,” Irvin said. “We have zero tolerance [of drugs] here, as in if we find it, you will be arrested. The county district attorney offices have a zero tolerance as well. You will be prosecuted and do your time in jail or prison, depending on what the case may be. It depends on if you’ve been arrested before or on what type [of drug] for how much punishment you get.”

Keeping good company and avoiding situations that could lead to a dangerous life are some of the easiest ways to stay out of trouble.

“I don’t feel like we have a major problem, but I’m not going to hide it that we do have small problems with teenagers,” Irvin said. “It comes back to this: it matters who your friends are and who you run with. You know who’s using drugs and not. It’s best if you keep yourself away from them and away from those situations. You won’t be tempted to try or do them.”