



THE UNIVERSITY of
MISSISSIPPI

WILLIAM MAGEE CENTER FOR AOD AND WELLNESS EDUCATION

Dear University of Mississippi Community,

We would like to take this opportunity to share information regarding the rise in opioid overdoses that occurred in 2020, a trend that continues into 2021. Any loss within our LOU community takes a heartbreaking toll. While it is lamentable that such situations would arise within our community, our team at the William Magee Center for AOD and Wellness Education remains dedicated to changing and improving lives through education, research, and support related to alcohol and other drugs and holistic well-being.

Opioids are a highly addictive class of drugs naturally found in the opium poppy plant. Inside the brain, opioids can elicit a variety of effects. The most common effect is pain relief. However, too much of this drug can create serious negative side effects like nausea, constipation, slowed breathing, loss of consciousness, and even death.

You may hear prescription opioids called OxyContin, Morphine, or Vicodin. A common synthetic opioid is called fentanyl. It is 50-100 times more potent than morphine, and a major cause in the increase of fatal overdoses within the United States (US). Heroin is an illegal form of opioid that is roughly 2 to 3 times more potent than morphine.

Over the last 30 years, opioid use has increased in dramatic fashion across the US resulting in nearly 450,000 people dying from an opioid overdose from 1999-2018. Today, an average of 130 Americans die each day and 55,000 die annually from opioid-related drug overdoses. Unfortunately, our community is no exception to these trends.

Due to COVID-19, these statistics have seen a steady climb since March 2020. Millennium Health, a national laboratory service, analyzed 500,000 urine drug tests in the periods before and after COVID-19 was declared a national emergency. They discovered a 32% increase of non-prescribed fentanyl use. This is a major concern causing experts to believe drug overdose rates will rise 20% this calendar year.

The COVID 19 pandemic has left many of us isolated and alone. Increase in loneliness can increase feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression many turning to substances like opioids to cope and escape reality. The increase of the use of substances alone, particularly opioids, has resulted in far more deaths than pre-pandemic.

It is time for our community to disrupt the culture.

So, to our students currently in need of alcohol or drug related support – know that the William Magee Center is designed to serve as a resource for YOU. If you are a student in need of support, or know of a peer in need, you can:

- Register for a wellness consultation to build a library of skills and behaviors.
- Enroll in our RebelADE program to empower yourself with tailored guidance and education regarding substance use.
- Simply visit our office to meet with any member of our staff to discuss your struggles, and develop new solutions.
- And lastly, follow our Disrupt the Culture initiative to learn more about how we are challenging and educating around the ways our community approaches substance use.

Many of you have asked us, “How can I help?”. There is never a single answer to substance use in our community. What we do know, is that the resources and behaviors just

mentioned form a powerful, protective shield around our students who are at risk of the dangers of substance use. If you would like to help us on our mission to support our students, the following is important guidance:

First – know the signs of a student in a concerning situation, and how to respond. Help shield students from the harms of substance use. When you notice concerning behavior, take personal responsibility in that moment to help create a safe space for that student to access help. Connect that student with our office, or create a CARE report to guarantee that a trained member of University of Mississippi staff reaches out to the student in need.

Second – and this applies if you or a peer is in an urgent substance use crisis – be aware of our Safety and Wellbeing Policy. Reach out to UPD for access to Narcan, and to receive secure transportation to medical care without fear of disciplinary action from the University.

This guidance, combined with our continuous education initiatives and your individual actions can create a tremendous, positive impact for our students. In the coming days, we will share information regarding campus resources, action plans for students in need, our Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Narcan, and safe space to create conversations among our student community to discuss campus concerns and campus needs.

We ask that you help us change the landscape of substance use in our community – help us **Disrupt the Culture**.



Dr. Natasha Jeter
Assistant Vice Chancellor for Wellness and Student Success



Erin Cromeans, MS, CHES
Assistant Director for Wellness Education, William Magee Center



Kyle Loggins, MS
Certified Prevention Specialist, William Magee Center



Sierra Elston, MS
Coordinator of Wellness Education, William Magee Center



Jazmine Kelley, MS, CHES
Coordinator of Wellness Education, William Magee Center