

Feds Double Down On Pills As Fentanyl Deaths Double



By Josh Bloom — July 14, 2018



The War Against Sweden Begins.

Photo:barks.jp [1]

Here's a splendid idea. Let's say that North Korea finally comes up with a missile that can travel more than 20 feet before blowing up and they decide to launch one at California. Naturally, we would retaliate by attacking... Sweden.

Ridiculous, right? Maybe so, but conceptually it is not a whole lot different from our war on the "opioid epidemic," which, to be accurate, should be called by its correct name - the "fentanyl epidemic." The strategy that our government is employing is much like attacking Sweden. We are fighting the wrong enemy. Pain medications, like Percocet and Vicodin, on their own, kill few relatively few people while illicit fentanyl and its monster analogs like carfentanil are responsible for the carnage we see daily on the news.

The proof of the failure of our inept strategy comes to us from the occasionally-reliable CDC in its July 11th report "*Rising Numbers of Deaths Involving Fentanyl and Fentanyl Analogs, Including Carfentanil, and Increased Usage and Mixing with Non-opioids.*"

The new report corrects previous data, which understated the number of fentanyl and fentanyl analog deaths. This is not the first time the CDC corrected itself. The last one - only a few months ago - was a real doozie. **(1)**

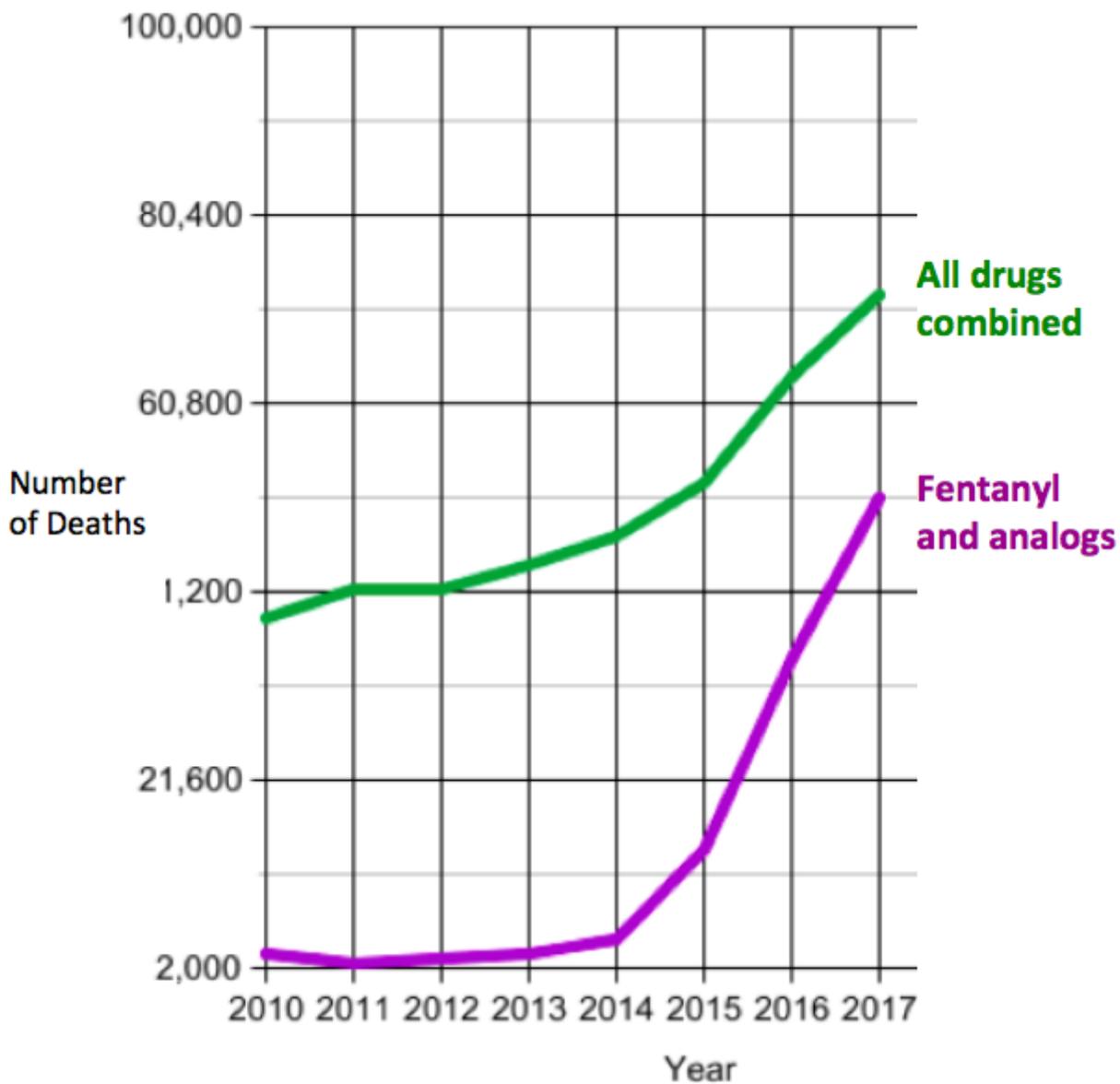
"The current update includes information on: (1) the continued increase in the supply of fentanyl and fentanyl analogs detected by law enforcement; (2) the sharp rise in overdose deaths involving fentanyl and fentanyl analogs in a growing number of states, in particular the growing number of deaths involving the ultra-high potency fentanyl analog known as

carfentanil..."

Here are some of the depressing (but not at all surprising) data from the CDC via the agency's Health Alert Network:

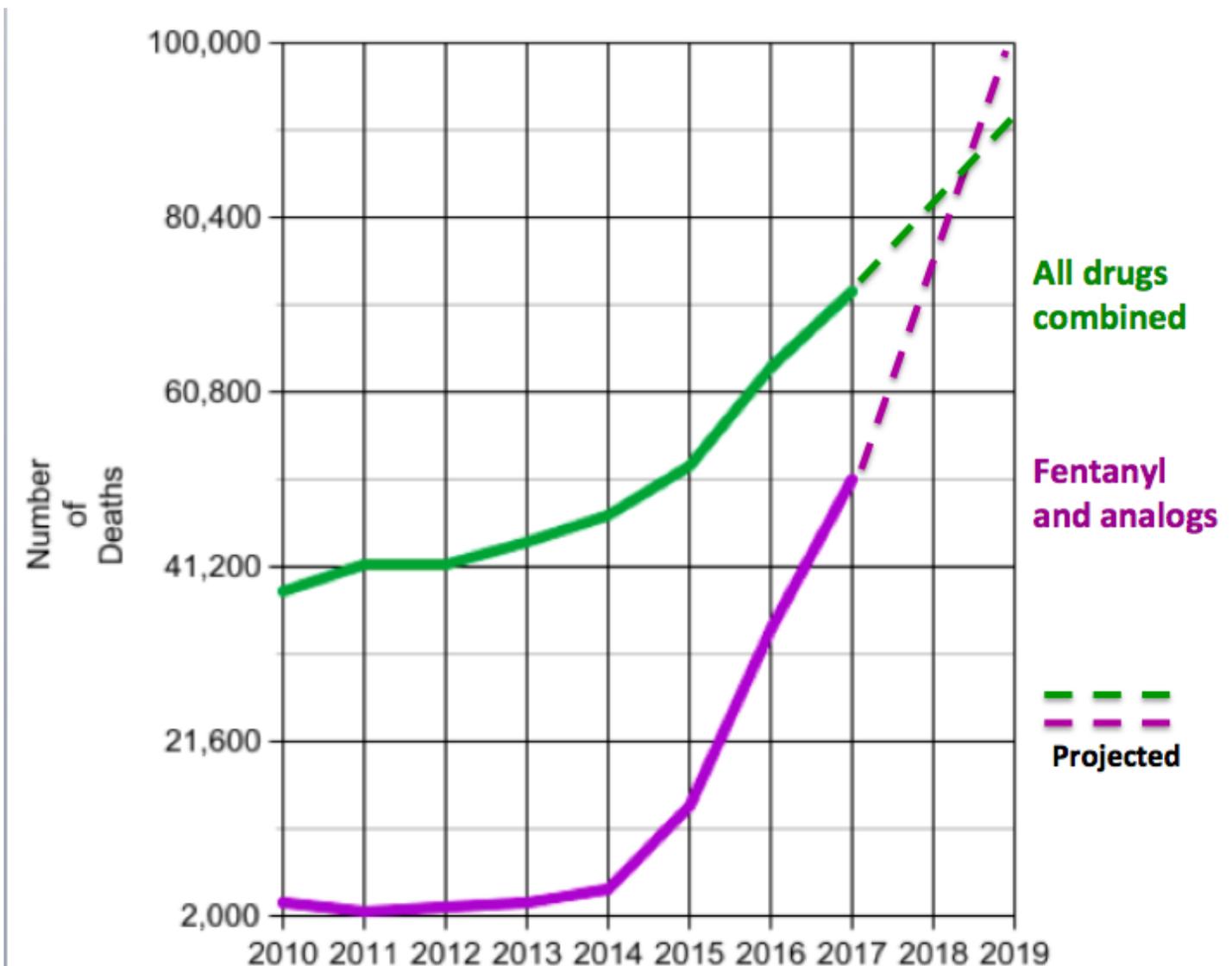
- Deaths involving illicit fentanyl and its analogs more than doubled from 2015 to 2016, rising from 14,440 to 34,119
- This trend worsened in 2017. There were an estimated 25,460 such deaths during the *first six months of the year alone*

OK, let's stop and make a graph of the number of deaths from these data.



Source: Deaths from all drugs by year: [National Vital Statistics System](#) [2], Deaths from fentanyl and its analogs: [National Institute On Drug Abuse](#) [3] (2). 2017 data are currently available only for the first six months of the year. I doubled it for the purposes of the graph, giving an estimate of 50,000 fentanyl deaths. In reality, given the explosive increase, the real number will almost certainly be higher.

Now let's take some liberties with the data. If the CDC can do this I figure I'm entitled to a certain amount of extrapolation, even though it is certifiably crazy. The liberty I took was extending the projected deaths out to 2019 based on the slopes of the lines in the past few years. Of course, assuming that these slopes will remain the same is bogus. But it's not a whole lot worse than the tricky stats that the CDC and PROP toss around and it illustrates a point.



Can you imagine the headlines in 2019???

"Fentanyl Responsible For 100,000 Of The 95,000 Drug Overdose Deaths In The US"

Which could only be explained by another headline...

"Fentanyl Kills Some People More Than Once"

OK, you get the point. As I've said a million times, it is street fentanyl (illegally made fentanyl and its analogs) that is the real enemy. So how are our leaders reacting? Not so well.

1. Andrew Kolodny could not have kept a straight face when he said this, right?

"[A 5% drop in addiction diagnosis] means that there's light at the end of the tunnel"

[Buzzfeed News](#) ^[4], July 12, 2018

I'm not sure what tunnel he's looking in, but he seems to be quite delighted with the fact that there were only 5.9 "opioid use disorder diagnoses" per 100,000 in 2017 compared to 6.2 in 2016. This whopping decrease (5%) could be explained by a difference in diagnostic criteria or statistical noise but if it's even real then does a decrease of 0.3 "addicted" people **(3)** per 100,000 really qualify as good news when the number of those dropping dead from fentanyl is doubling every six months?

2. And the Department of Justice hasn't quite figured things out, which is evident from Attorney General Jeff Sessions:

"Under this proposed new rule [which restricts the number of pills that can be made], if DEA believes that a company's opioids are being diverted for misuse, then they will reduce the amount of opioids that company can make,"

Jeff Session, [Reuters](#) ^[5], April 2018

So, I guess if we make fewer pills then fewer people will die from fentanyl. Which is fine except for a 25% drop in opioid prescriptions over the past five years has been accompanied by a 25-fold increase in fentanyl deaths. Yeah, that's gonna work.

And the \$64,000 question is why people like Sessions are still using the 64,000 number, even though we all know that it has virtually nothing to do with overdoses of Vicodin or Percocet. From the same article:

Today we are facing the deadliest drug crisis in American history... "Approximately 64,000 Americans lost their lives to drug overdoses in 2016, the highest drug death toll and the fastest increase in that death toll in American history."

President Trump doesn't seem all that familiar with the facts either.

And you have people that go to the hospital with a broken arm, and they come out and they're addicted. They're addicted to painkillers, and they don't even know what happened. They go in for something minor, and they come out and they're in serious shape.

Remarks by President Trump at the [White House Opioids Summit](#) ^[6], March 1, 2018

No, that is incorrect. People don't go into the hospital and come out in serious shape because:

1. There is plenty of literature that shows that pain patients rarely become addicted, especially in such a short timeframe.
2. With the anti-opioid hysteria we're now going through if you go into the hospital with a broken arm it's not all that unlikely that you'll be accused of breaking your own arm just to get high and sent home with Tylenol, which works as well as a Tootsie Roll.

Speaking of broken bones, who could forget what the empathetic Jeff Sessions has to say about that:

"I mean, people need to take some aspirin sometimes and tough it out a little... That's what Gen. Kelly—you know, he's a Marine—[he] had surgery on his hands, painful surgery. [He said,] 'I'm not taking any drugs!' It did hurt, though. It did hurt. A lot of people—you can get through these things." (4)

So, the war goes on and on and on, people keep dying, and no one in our government seems to be learning anything.

Perhaps Lichtenstein will be in our sights once we get rid of Sweden. Pathetic.

NOTES:

(1) See [The CDC Quietly Admits It Screwed Up Counting Opioid Pills](#) [7]

(2) Data are taken from a graph and are approximate.

(3) Data consisted of Blue Cross Blue Shield members.

(4) I can't help but wonder if Sessions would change his tune if went to an ER with an elephant tusk embedded in his rectum and was sent home with one baby aspirin.

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Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/07/12/government-doubles-down-pills-fentanyl-deaths-double-13190>

Links

[1] <https://www.barks.jp/news/?id=1000154674>

[2] https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db294_table.pdf#page=1

[3] <https://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/overdose-death-rates>

[4] https://www.buzzfeed.com/danvergano/opioid-addiction-decline-blue-cross?utm_term=.gaQwVkGAQ#.ps8X0erwm

[5] <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-justice-dea-opioids/u-s-drug-agency-to-propose-rules-to-rein-in-opioid-manufacturing-idUSKBN1HO2U1>

[6] <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-white-house-opioids-summit/>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/03/19/cdc-quietly-admits-it-screwed-dishonestly-counting-pills-12717>