

Outback Steakhouse Manager Dies After Taking One Counterfeit Oxycodone Pill



Maggie Crowley

On the evening of September 1, 2016, in Wellington, Florida, Maggie Crowley, a 34-year-old Outback Steakhouse manager, took a single oxycodone pill to deal with chronic back pain from an old injury. She died almost instantly of furanyl fentanyl poisoning.

Maggie, the second of four siblings from a tight-knit Italian-Catholic family in Fair Lawn, New Jersey, had a bright personality, and was a steadfast, generous, loyal friend. Maggie moved to Florida after marrying her husband, Shaun Crowley, in 2014. Though she was farther away, she stayed close to her family by phone, talking her brother, Joe, through buying his first house and speaking with her sisters and young nephews almost every day.

On September 1, Maggie and Shaun made plans to go out to dinner after Maggie had a quick shower. When she hadn't emerged from the bedroom almost an hour later, Shaun went to check on her. He found her lying, unmoving, on the bed. When he lifted her face up, he saw that it was blue. The police came, and the coroner's office removed Maggie, covered, on a gurney. After a weeklong delay caused by Hurricane Hermine, Shaun flew his wife home, where her devastated family and friends threw a well-attended funeral and wake.

Maggie's family believed that she had died of an overdose from legitimate medicine until a December 2016 autopsy report told them she had died of fentanyl poisoning. When, in October 2017, authorities arrested Vero Beach surgeon Dr. Johnny Benjamin, Jr., they learned that Maggie had turned to a coworker for extra oxycodone pills when the tramadol she had been prescribed was not strong enough to control her back pain. Benjamin had manufactured the "oxycodone" pills himself using a pill press and imported fentanyl. In April 2018, Benjamin, Maggie's coworker, Kevan Slater and a middleman, Zachary Stewart, were found guilty of charges related to the possession and distribution of fentanyl. Sentencing is expected in the summer of 2018.

Guilty verdicts have not eased her family's loss. "The things where it's the five of us and there should be six, it's physically painful," Maggie's older sister, Kristen, told us. "Our family is very, very close, and I think my parents take comfort in having us around, but at the same time it's difficult because there's always someone missing."

Maggie's other siblings feel the same way. Her brother is haunted by the fact that his baby, born after Maggie's death, will never meet her. Younger sister Caroline lingers over the impact on her sons, now eight and six, who had trouble understanding the loss. "Does she have her cell phone on her? Can we FaceTime her in heaven?" they asked when Maggie died. The boys put drawings in their aunt's casket, Caroline told us and wrote letters they tied to balloons, imagining that Maggie would see them. "They're okay. They're getting better," Caroline says, "Sometimes if I let them see me cry, they'll say to me, 'You miss Aunt Maggie, don't you?' and tell me that I'll see Maggie again, in heaven." ■

46 States Have a Deadly Fentanyl Problem

What is in these fake pills?

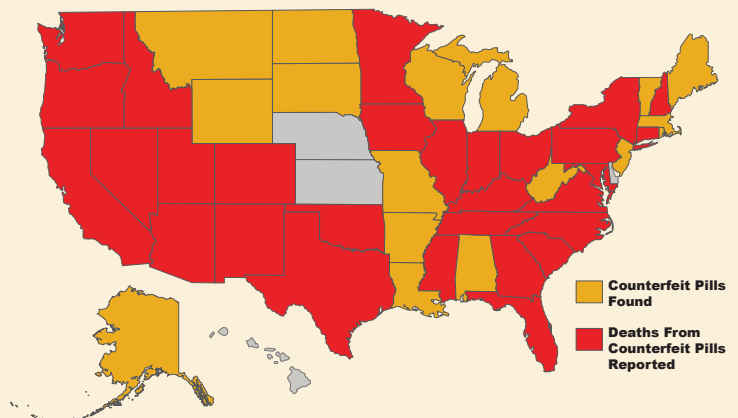
Pills that look like prescription painkillers, anti-anxiety meds, and even aspirin have all been found. They contain deadly doses of fentanyl or related analogues sourced from illegal labs overseas.

Where do they come from?

Mexican cartels and rogue Chinese manufacturers make finished pills which are then smuggled and mailed into the U.S. Illicit Chinese chemical companies also mail raw fentanyl and pill presses to ambitious U.S. drug dealers who then use them to make counterfeit prescription medication.

When did the epidemic start?

Cartels and dealers first mixed fentanyl into heroin in the 1990s, but the first reports of fake prescription medications made with fentanyl came in 2014.



As of January 2019, counterfeit fentanyl pills have been found in 46 states with confirmed deaths in 29. The full "46 States and Counting" update is available at <http://safedr.org/46states>