

Testimony of  
**Mitsy Fetko**

March 12, 2008

Senate Judiciary Hearing  
March 12, 2008

Good afternoon.

My name is Misty Fetko and I am a registered nurse who works in a very busy Emergency Room in Central Ohio, but more importantly, I am a mother of two wonderful boys.

I am here today to tell you the story of my oldest son, Carl.

Carl was my beautiful little boy; eyes like large, dark chocolates, an infectious smile, and an insatiable curiosity. I spent years protecting him from harm, but four years ago, harm found a way to sneak in and steal the life of this gifted young man.

It was the morning of July 16, 2003. Carl had just graduated from high school and was getting ready to leave for Memphis College of Art in two days. The college had courted him after he won an award for artwork he created his junior year of high school.

The night before, Carl and I had sat in his room and talked with each other about this day at work and the pending trip to Memphis. At the end of the conversation, he smiled and hugged me, he said, "Goodnight Mom. Love you."

The next morning I decided to walk the dog before waking Carl. While walking next to his car, I noticed an empty bottle of Robitussin in Carl's backseat. Instantly, I knew something was wrong. I had been vigilant for signs of drug abuse in the past and hadn't seen many, but the previous summer I had found two empty bottles of Robitussin in our basement after a sleepover with friends. I knew something was up. I rushed to his bedroom door only to find it locked. After finding my way in, I discovered Carl lying peacefully in bed, motionless with leg crossed, but he wasn't responding to my screams, and he wasn't breathing.

I quickly transformed from mother to nurse and I began CPR, desperately trying to breathe life back into my son. I could not believe that what I had feared most in life had happened, but I still did not know what had caused this nightmare.

We are a very close family. I am a very involved mother. Carl had always assured me that he wasn't using alcohol or drugs. I, the ever watchful mother, believed him, as there wasn't any evidence to prove differently.

During Carl's junior year of high school, I found the first evidence of marijuana in his room. After all the talks and all the reassurances between us, what had changed? I intervened, and didn't see anything else suspicious until that summer when I found the two empty bottles of Robitussin in our basement. I was determined to keep drugs out of our house, but cough medicine? I went to search for answers on the internet, but found nothing and then confronted my son. Carl explained that he and his friends had heard you could get high off cough medicine and tried it, but nothing happened. I was reassured, once again, that he wasn't using "hard" drugs and not to worry. Finding no further evidence, I believed him.

During Carl's senior year, I knew the he had developed an interest in marijuana, but I thought we were doing what we needed to address this problem. So why on that dreadful July morning did I discover my son had passed away during the night?

During the next several months after Carl's death, I frantically searched for answers. What signs did I miss?

During my search, I found two more empty bottles of Robitussin. But it wasn't until after talking with his friends and finding journal entries on his computer did I discover that Carl had been abusing cough medicine intermittently over the past 2 ½ years. He documented his abuse on his computer journal. Through the internet and his friends, Carl had researched and educated himself on how to use these products to get high. He wrote about and enjoyed the hallucinations achieved upon intentionally overdosing on cough and cold products. Carl had described the "pull" that he felt towards the disassociative effects of abusing the cough medicine and seemed to crave the effects.

According to the journal, Carl had gradually increased the amount of cough medicine he was abusing from 4 ounces to 12 ounces.

As his abuse increased, many things in his life were changing: graduation, college, his parent's divorce, and increasing pressures in life.

I wouldn't find out until the morning of Carl's death what he and many others knew about his abuse of cough medicine. The danger that I so desperately tried to keep out of our house had found a way to sneak in secretly. The signs at the time did not indicate to me signs of drug abuse: there were no needles, powders, smells, large amounts of money being spent, or other signs that are typically associated with drug abuse.

Carl's autopsy report revealed that he had died from a lethal mix of drugs: Fentanyl, a strong prescription narcotic, Cannaboids found in marijuana, and Dextromethorphan or DXM, the active ingredient in cough medicine where found in his system.

To this day, I don't know where Carl obtained the Fentanyl patch. There were no journal entries which talked about any use of painkillers. Was this his first time? Was he looking for a different high? We will never know why Carl made the wrong choice to abuse prescription and over the counter drugs. We only know parts of his story by the words he left behind in his journal; his words are now silent.

Abuse of over the counter and prescription drugs is a very large and very concerning problem. We are seeing more teens in our Emergency Department who have overdosed on these drugs. It is becoming more of the norm than the exception. A couple of weeks ago a young man was brought into the Emergency Room who was at a home with his friends. They found him unresponsive and barely breathing. He was rushed to the hospital by medics. He had been chewing on a Fentanyl patch; several unopened patches were found in his pants pockets. A couple of days ago a young girl was brought in from school where she had taken 30 Coricidin tablets that morning just trying to get high. She spent the next several days in our intensive care unit.

Thank you for inviting me so that I could share Carl's story. If loving Carl were enough, Carl would have lived forever. It is now with this love that I tell his story so that others are aware of the grave dangers of this type of drug abuse.

Thank you.