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World Health Organization

Topic B: "The U.S fentanyl crisis"

Written by: Eugenia Macedo Orozco

I. COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

The World Health Organization, also known as WHO, directs and coordinates global health issues within the United Nations system, whose primary role is to shape the health research agenda, set health-related norms and standards, articulate evidence-based policy options, provide resources and technical support to countries, and monitor global health trends. It was founded in 1948 and its headquarters are currently situated in Geneva, Switzerland. Additionally, their investigation and performance are heavily influenced by scientific data and reliable documents.

II. HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

A. Introduction to the topic

Fentanyl is a drug used to relieve and moderate severe pain. Although fentanyl effects can be similar to those of nicotine and morphine, it has been statistically proven that it can be 50 to 200 times more powerful. Fentanyl, administered under very specific circumstances, is usually used for patients who are proven tolerant to other opioids and need a more powerful kind of drug to receive the desired effects.

When used in the wrong circumstances and proportions, Fentanyl can be fatal, causing severe breathing problems and complete shutting down of the body. Due to its extreme effects, an approximate of two milligrams of fentanyl is enough to deliver an instant overdose and death.

B. Evolution of the topic

Fentanyl was first synthesized in 1960, by Dr Paul Janssen, with the purpose of developing an opioid with stronger molecules and effects in the human body. This led Janssen to discover different drugs and medications, but it wasn't until the 60's when fentanyls popularity escalated, taking the headlines as the most potent synthetic opioid in the world. In 1963, the opioid was first introduced into the Western Countries, where it was frequently merged with other medications and used as an injected painkiller.

Nevertheless, Fentanyl wasn't approved by the US Food and Drug Administration until 1968, due to its facility in overdose. With the purpose of minimizing its abuse potential, pharmaceutical companies and the FDA only authorized its consumption in combination with Droperidol, a less potent drug. It was finally available for use in 1972. The drug gained popularity due to its substantial role in cardiac and vascular surgery. In 1981, when its patent came to an end, its sales increased drastically. Throughout the leading years, reports of accidental overdose and mistreatment were more frequent, especially among the young generations. In the 1980's, Alza corporation, a leading pharmaceutical company specialized in pain medications and management, released a transdermal drug patch containing great amounts of fentanyl. This product, named Duragesic, was later used in patients suffering from severe

chronic pain. Other companies like Anesta Corporation, started developing medical products with traces of fentanyl, specialized in patients with a higher tolerance to normal opiates like morphine. These medications were introduced in different shapes and sizes: a tablet, an intravenous painkiller or even a lolly-pop.

It wasn't until the early 2000's when Fentanyl's consumption rates started to increase. Owing to the alarming statistics of its use, the FDA started compiling information about its causes and taking action towards the issue. It was later revealed that a considerable number of doctors were misprescribing the drug in its different forms, usually as Duragesic. Simultaneously, the Actiq lollipop, a Fentanyl medication used specially for cancer patients with a high tolerance to normal opiates, was being misprescribed to people who didn't even suffer from cancer. The rising crisis began when the drug started to be illicitly manufactured and smuggled into the country, causing an overall overdose death toll of 1,000 citizens.

C. Relevant events

In 2013, the consumption of Fentanyl surpassed both heroin and oxycontin in the opioid epidemic as a consequence of misprescribing and illicit production. Ever since, the numbers of fentanyl overdoses have sky-rocketed. Due to the facility and low cost involved in the production of the drug, fentanyl-laced pills are being disguised as legitimate medications like Adderall or Vicodin and illegally exported into the USA; either by social media or cartel's networks. As a result, patients who think that are taking prescribed medications are in reality consuming a high dose of fentanyl.

A solution that has been applied all over the country is medicating narcan/naloxone to patients with a severe addiction or overdose. Naloxone is used to reverse the effects given by the opioids. However, naloxone introduces the patient into the withdrawal phase, which usually involves extreme pain and other severe side effects. Another solution is the application of fentanyl test strips, which are capable of detecting a fentanyl-laced substance. Nevertheless, test strips are still on probation after being classified as illegal drug paraphernalia.

This powerful drug became a leading cause of death among adults 18-45, overtaking Covid-19, cancer, heart disease and all other accidents, with an approximate of 150 deaths per day. As U.S Attorney General, Merrick Garland, stated in a recent conference, about 10 million fentanyl counterfeit pills have been seized and more than 800 suspected drug traffickers have been arrested in the months of August and September. These alarming rates have marked a new point in the decades-long opioid epidemic, with the issued public safety warning by the DEA (U.S Drug Enforcement Administration), its first in the last six years.

III. CURRENT ISSUES

A. Panorama

Fentanyl has affected millions of citizen's lives, most of the time unintentionally. The opioid crisis has transcended into far more than just overdoses and deaths, it has placed the citizens' lives at risk, taking away their trust and reliance in the health department. Patients have stopped taking prescribed medicines such as Aderall with the fear of it being fentanyl-laced. Along with the constant manufacturing of the drug and its availability over the world, the fentanyl crisis has resulted in a fatal decline of the health system, decreasing its potential to acces those in need and

at risk. This has resulted in the loss of tens of billions of dollars per year, both in health care costs and in terms of a diminished workforce.

B. Points of view

United States

The United States, being the leading country in the fentanyl crisis, has taken sides in blaming physicians for over and misprescribing the substance. In recent years, the U.S government has ramped up efforts to reduce both international and domestic supplies of opioids by limiting prescriptions and offering counternarcotics assistance abroad. Simultaneously, federal officers have been working to lower the demand by putting more of an emphasis on treating drug users rather than penalizing them. With an approximation of 1,500 deaths per weekend, the DEA has officially launched a warning owing to the alarming rates of dependence and deaths.

Mexico

Mexico plays a leading role in the fentanyl crisis being one of the primary sources of illicitly manufactured fentanyl, with China as an exporter of its chemicals. Mexican cartels are seen to have taken advantage of the current rise of fentanyl's popularity by lacing the drug with other substances such as cocaine, morphine and marijuana, frequently without the user's knowledge. Moreover, fentanyl has had a significant appearance in Mexican patient's respiratory and overdose problems, often being the principal cause of it. (Poner sobre los laboratorios clandestinos de mexico)

China

China has contributed significantly to the fentanyl crisis, being the primary source of its chemicals. In May 2019, the Chinese government banned the production of the drug, which led to a significant reduction of its international trade. Nonetheless, fentanyl vendors started trading in online networks and social media, shipping them directly into the US, Europe and Mexico. Although there has been several federal restrictions regarding the smuggling of the drug, chinese dealers have developed different strategies to continue negotiating with american and mexican producers.

Canada

Canada, having the second world's most largest per capita regarding consumers of opioids, is facing a current struggle towards maintaining a stable fentanyl consumption in its country. Although the rates and overdoses are fewer than those in the US, Canada still encounters a potential threat towards its citizen's health. Since the 2016, there has been an approximate of 10,000 deaths concerning fentanyl, with British Columbia and Alberta as the major consumers. The federal government, concerned by the increasing deaths and overdoses, imposed several laws in order to maintain the statistics. These include the prohibition of the importation of devices used to produce fentanyl (such as pill presses and encapsulators), the examination of mail weighing 30g or less, and the streamlining of applications for supervising consumption sites.

Russia

Following the Ukraine-Russia dispute, The United States strictly limited the trade of fentanyl-related chemicals to Russia, since the chemicals provide a potential advantage in military weapons. Unless the vendor owns a validated license from the American Government, fentanyl exported to Russia is strictly prohibited.

I. UN & EXTERNAL ACTIONS

A. UN actions

In 2003, the UNODC, along with 58 partner countries and 23 organizations, developed a series of resolutions, called the Paris Pact Initiative, in order to face the following years of crisis. The Paris Pact Initiative became a crucial framework for combating illicit trafficking in opioids originating from eastern countries; Afghanistan being its main target. The initiative is composed of four pillars. The first, *strengthening*

and implementing regional initiatives, including providing support, taking measures to stop the production of precursor chemicals etc. The second pillar consists in *detecting and blocking financial blocks* linked to illicit trafficking of these opiates, by exchanging information and developing the enforcement of national legislation. The third pillar, aims to prevent the diversion of precursor chemicals, through the examination of suspicious transactions and the enhancement of organizations and other partnerships in order to facilitate the detection of these diversions. Ultimately, the fourth pillar consists in reducing drug abuse and addiction through a comprehensive approach with the patients.

B. External actions

The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs

In 2019, The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs developed a strategy with the purpose of disrupting the production of illicit synthetic opioids, including fentanyl. This five-year strategy includes 3 main initiatives: 1) spread awareness over international institutions to mobilize global response; 2) work alongside the People's Republic of China and Mexico to minimize the illegal production and exportation of illicitly manufactured fentanyl pills; 3) The enforcement of a law in which transnational criminals involved in any kind of illegal opioid issue will undergo a financial sanction.

Health Alert Network Advisory by the CDC

In the previous year, the CDC issued a Health Alert Network advisory with the purpose of reinforcing the following actions: expanding the distribution of naloxone, spreading awareness of the availability of treatments, the intervention with individuals who are in potential risk of

addiction or overdose, and the recollection of data and detection of overdose cases in order to facilitate a response.

II. CONCLUSION

As previously seen, fentanyl has caused commotion and fatal deaths all over the world, specifically in the United States. Although regulations and law enforcements have done everything in their power to minimize the problem, abuse and dependance rates keep rising, with an approximate of 150 deaths per day. Delegates are encouraged to find a solution to combat this alarming situation and encounter a way to work internationally.

III. IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- What is your country's role in the fentanyl crisis?
- Does your country have any law enforcements towards unprescribed and illegal opioid consumption?
- Is your country currently doing something to prevent the issue?
- How might your country contribute to the minimization of opioid consumption and illegal misprescribing and production?

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