

Statement of
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My name is Gerad Troutman, I am a board certified emergency medicine physician and am the president elect of the Texas College of Emergency Physicians, a professional organization that represents over 2200 Texas emergency physicians. I worked several years in Lubbock, TX at University Medical Center (UMC), the region's largest healthcare system. Currently, I primarily work in a much smaller emergency center, called ER Now, a freestanding emergency center in Amarillo, TX. I also work occasionally at Ben Taub General Hospital, the largest trauma center in the fourth largest city of our country, Houston, TX. I also am an EMS medical director where I help set policy and medical protocols for our prehospital EMS providers in both Amarillo and Lubbock, TX.

I specifically remember one of the very first patients I saw at UMC who had allegedly used 'synthetic cannabinoids'. Being the areas tax subsidized healthcare system, I was accustomed to seeing many patients who were unfunded, homeless, and simply down on their luck. With that came those who used drugs regularly, thugs, murderers, and people who we often forget about, or don't care to admit, make up a portion of America. This patient, we will call him Kyle, was different. He wasn't one of those people. I could tell by the way he was dressed, the personality of his friends, and later the love glowing from his parents. His friends, all just 16, said they left school and stopped in at a convenience store to get some soda and candy. They noticed, right there by the register, was a packet of 'incense' called Go Bananas. The clerk encouraged them to give it a try, "Just roll it up and smoke it. It is no big deal, it makes you feel really good... and it's legal." Kyle and his friends weren't drug users, they were not even troublemakers at school. In a whim, and noting the evident safety of this substance, they figured 'what the heck' and bought some. Kyle's friends recounted the story that they had a hard time trying to 'roll the stuff into a cigarette' as none of them had even smoked a cigarette before. The boys finally figured it out, and now lit the item they had made in front of them. They joked about who would go first, and Kyle was willing to be that one. The friends said he took one puff on that thing, not even that long, and he choked and coughed. He said it was disgusting and threw it down. Nobody else tried it. They were close to Kyle's house, and made it to his home where his parents were and all seemed normal....

His friends came in, and they were going to play video games, a normal late afternoon for the bunch. Almost suddenly, Kyle changed. He became deep voiced, yelling, screaming, and grabbing at his friends throats as if trying to choke them. His parents saw the behavior and were almost even attacked by him. Not having any idea what to do, they called 911. EMS, fire, and police department forces quickly arrived on scene. It took 3 fireman, two cops, and one paramedic to get Kyle into the ambulance. He was flailing about, hitting, punching, spitting. His parents were in shock, as were his friends. The prehospital providers had a hunch about what was going on, "Did he smoke any legal?", they asked his friends. The friends, not wanting to be in trouble for what seemed like a legal thing for them to do, did admit that Kyle did.

I was working a shift at UMC when the 911 call came over the radio that EMS was inbound with a teenage that had used 'legal'. That's all we were calling it at that time, it was a relatively new 'thing' we were starting to see more and more in the ER. EMS arrived with 6 people surrounding the stretcher. Kyle was a big boy, he worked out and was strong. He was

fighting as if he was superhuman. He had a mask on because he had been spitting at the EMS providers. We got him into our trauma bay and I examined him as best as I could. I will never forget the look in his eyes, he looked possessed. He looked at me and said, "Someone needs to sh*t in my mouth to make it stop." You could have heard a pin drop in the trauma bay where my team of 15 or so healthcare providers paused in shock...

We have heard a lot of things working in a county ER, typically from patients with uncontrolled schizophrenia or very long term drug users who have long 'fried their brains'. This was particularly strange as this kid just didn't fit the bill. Since he was fighting us so hard, I made the clinical decision to put him into a medical induced coma. This worked. He slowed down. He laid there, he breathed, and we watched his vital signs. I was able to leave the room and go address his friends and family. I could tell right away, this kid wasn't a thug. His friends, his family that was gathering. This was the family and kid that all of America strives to be. His friends told me the entire story about how they bought the "Go Bananas" at the convenience store and how Kyle took one smoke of it. I told them that this 'stuff' was something new we were just starting to see in the ER. People acted various ways, I had seen people with strokes, with funny heart rhythms, and that some of my parents had seen patients die. The only cure is time, for the poison to leave the body. We would leave Kyle in the ER for several hours to monitor him closely and see if he 'wakes up' his normal self.

Hours later, I was called to the Trauma bay where Kyle was. His stay since being chemically sedated, had been uneventful. He was now waking up. Earlier I saw a demonic possessed human, now I saw what might as well been me at 17. Kyle responded me politely. His parents and friends had filled him in on what was happening. He was clueless. I talked to him, told him how many nurses, fireman, and police officers it took to simply hold him down so that we could get him medications to calm him down before he hurt himself or did something he would regret forever. I recanted to him the statement he made to me. This was a kid that didn't cuss, didn't lie, didn't cheat, and didn't steal. He made a very choice that many teenagers do, trying something out of the norm that he knew his parents may not favor of him, but not something that was blatantly illegal. The vast majority of male teenagers take a swig of alcohol or try a cigarette. Very few 'try' a drug such as cocaine or methamphetamine.

Since Kyle, I have seen dozens, if not hundreds of patients that have used synthetic cannabinoids. Working in the ER, I saw many of the same messages that patients gave it a try because it was right there, next to the cigarettes or perhaps the gum. Unfortunately, I have seen those patients have seizures, have funny heart rhythms, have strokes, and I have seen them die.

When a patient uses cocaine, methamphetamines, or even heroin, I can give you a play by play as to what will probably happen with the patient. Perhaps some agitation, an increased heart rate, even having increased hunger. People die from these drugs, but it is more often due to longer term use, or using a 'very large amount' at once. Regular drug users tend to die from some sort of violent means, and not from the drugs themselves. Synthetic cannabinoids are incredibly different because every batch seems to effect a human differently. People can assumedly smoke an entire pack, perhaps get a 'high' and not have any further issue. The next person, or the next batch, with one hit, can have a massively debilitating stroke or have their heart stop and die.

This, coupled with the easy access of this drug, makes it incredibly dangerous to our society. I believe many people have used this who normally wouldn't use a bonafide 'illegal' drug. They view this as safe when it is so easily available to purchase. The healthcare repercussions from this drug is costing society millions of dollars in a time when we are trying to conserve our healthcare dollars. We need to make the sale, possession, and the use of this debilitating drug a serious crime. I strongly believe this will largely curtail its use, allow many lives to be saved, and save our country a lot of money.