

Car Accidents are More Than Statistics: They Are Personal

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In 2005, my mother dropped my sister and I off at school and traveled her regular route to work. Only two miles from our school, my mother was hit by a car directly into her door panel, totalling her car. Thankfully, my mom was not badly injured, but as a five year old child, I was greatly impacted by the event. The thought that I could lose my mother to a car accident became a reality. The investigation discovered that the man who hit my mother's car had recently undergone back surgery and was on a narcotic pain medication, which affected his reflexes and ability to drive safely.

When we think of "driving under the influence," we think about drunk driving. Rarely do we consider that driving while taking prescription pain killers is considered to be driving under the influence as well. Raising awareness about the dangers of driving under the influence of prescription pain killers can help to prevent accidents like the one my mom experienced, but more importantly, it can prevent fatal accidents.

In my home state of Florida, the Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles department reports that driving under the influence accounts for nearly 15% of all fatal crashes. (Florida Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles, 2019) Recent studies have concluded that prescription pain killers have a comparable affect on drivers as those who register a .05 blood alcohol concentration. The study reported that prescription opioids more than doubled the risk of causing a fatal two-car accident. (US News and World Report, 2019) An intervention focused on raising awareness of the hazards of driving while taking prescription pain medication could effectively decrease fatal accidents.

In 2018, prescription drugs were associated with 81 percent of all drug related deaths. (National Institute of Justice, 2019) For states like Florida, with a disproportionately high prescription drug usage rate, additional emphasis on the hazards of driving while under the influence is imperative. Pain management clinics must be responsible for the implementation of a “hazard training” for every individual who is prescribed prescription drugs. The training must include detailing the risks of driving while on the medication and also safeguarding medication from those who may steal and abuse the medication. A partnership with Lyft and Uber can be developed to encourage pain medication users to use the ride services at a discounted rate while their prescriptions are active. Reducing the number of drivers who are taking pain medication will save lives.

Bibliography

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