

This ran in the Tucson Citizen (Arizona) on January 30, 2009:

Education needed to stop overdoses

Heath Ledger's posthumous Oscar nomination, falling on the one-year anniversary of his death, is a wake-up call to all of us.

We need to start talking about the preventable tragedy of overdose and the need for more education and outreach to people at risk. We, as a country, have been far too silent about this hidden crisis for far too long.

We should be talking about how, according to the Centers for Disease Control, alcohol and drug overdose are the No. 1 one injury-related cause of death among people ages 35 to 54.

We should be talking about the more than 22,000 Americans who die every year from accidental overdose and that the majority of those deaths occur among people using prescription drugs.

Maybe we don't talk about it because of the terrible and persistent stigma associated with fatal drug overdose. Silence and stigma kill people - just ask the earliest activists for AIDS awareness and prevention.

Maybe if people knew about the lifesaving drug naloxone - which immediately reverses opioid overdose and is cheap, easy to use and effective - they'd feel more comfortable talking about overdose prevention.

Let's take this opportunity to finally start a conversation about the many ways we can prevent more deaths in the future. Let's bring the topic out in the open so we can finally work toward putting an end to this tragedy.

We can't bring Heath Ledger back, but we can make sure his death was not in vain by finally bringing overdose prevention into the spotlight where it belongs.

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