



POSITION PAPER ON THE UNMITIGATED KILLINGS OF SUSPECTED DRUG USERS THAT HAVE AFFECTED OUR CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS, AND THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE RANDOM DRUG TESTING OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

Prepared by the Philippine Society of Adolescent Medicine Specialists for the Philippine Pediatric Society, Inc.

The **Philippine Pediatric Society**, an advocate of the well-being and rights of children, condemns in no uncertain terms the brutal shooting of 17-year old Kian Lloyd de los Santos and thousands of other suspected drug users and pushers. It calls upon the authorities to wage the government's war on drugs with due regard for the sanctity of human life and with a more lucid understanding of the nature of drug addiction and the complex solutions it demands.

Adolescents, who are prone to risk-taking and peer pressure, are most vulnerable to drugs. Many experiment with tobacco, alcohol and illicit drugs without realizing the negative consequences. Drugs can disrupt ongoing adolescent brain development resulting in problems with memory, motivation and academic performance. Drugs may also cause depression, anxiety, and even psychotic disorders.

PPS recognizes the importance of addressing drug use among adolescents but the government's plan to conduct random drug testing has to be studied closely. Proponents argue that this will prevent students from using drugs and that the negative consequences of having a positive drug test can deter further use.

Let us examine the existing research and recommendations from respected medical bodies.

Is it effective? In April 2015, the American Academy of Pediatrics, in a policy statement entitled "Adolescent Drug Testing Policies in Schools," supports the efforts of schools to address student substance abuse, but **recommends against random drug testing in schools**. It claims that there is as yet limited evidence to the efficacy of such action. Many available psychoactive substances are not detectable by standard drug testing. Adolescents may attempt to outsmart drug testing by switching to a substance that is not detectable by urine testing or is not included in the panel. The AAP concluded that there is not enough research-based evidence to justify random school-based drug testing.

Is drug testing easy to do? Authorities have to consider that a nationwide random drug testing in schools requires complex medical procedures. Sample collection requires directly observed urine collection and a two-step testing procedure: drug detection and confirmation of results. It is claimed that screening immunoassays performed without

confirmatory testing will not differentiate between false-negative and false-positive test results. Interpretation of random drug testing should be done by trained clinicians.

Is it cost effective? Another important issue is the cost-effectiveness of this random blood testing. Confirmatory tests, which are the gold standard for detection of substances, are quite expensive. With the government's limited financial means, a random school-based drug testing program may drain the resources of the Department of Education and other cooperating agencies.

What are potential harms? There are risks in drug testing that includes potential breach of confidentiality between student and school, deterioration of school-student relationship, and mistakes in interpretation of drug tests that result in false positives. Moreover, this approach may be damaging to the adolescent who may be subjected to harsher consequences once identified, not only by the school but also by the community at large. Quick and fast solutions, such as the irrational elimination of suspected drug users, may be resorted to as a plausible solution.

Solving the drug problem demands a concerted multi-level and multi-sectoral approach that goes beyond the killing suspected drug users.

The PPS believes in the following solutions:

- **Strengthening of family systems** and values and providing support by properly organized community-based and school-based programs to families that have been torn apart by poverty, impaired relationships, wars, and migration of domestic workers.
- **Strengthening family skills** through improved parent-child communication, and providing drug education and information will be helpful.
- **Parental monitoring and supervision** is important, just as rule-setting and praising for appropriate behavior is relevant. The more risks the child is exposed to, the more chances that he will abuse drugs.
- **Early detection** of risk factors like academic failure, early aggression, and school dropout need to be addressed by schools and communities.
- **In adolescents**, competence in **drug resistance skills** and reinforcement of anti-drug attitudes, and strengthening personal commitments against drug use are recommended.

• **Consistent messages** delivered through a concerted effort by the community – families, schools, barangay leaders, faith-based organizations – can prove effective.

The quick solution offered by the ruthless elimination of drug users can seem more dramatic, but the impact on the families and the dissolution of relationships is tantamount to destroying the very base of our society. When this happens, children and adolescents are often left alone to deal with the aftermath. They will return to temporary and quick solutions, like drug use, to ease the bitterness and misfortune of their situation. The PPS's recommended solutions while more methodical and laborious, may have positive impact on children, adolescents, and the community as a whole.

References:

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