

## World

# Injection rooms open as opioid crisis deepens

## United States

Boer Deng New York

It wasn't the first time Danny had overdosed. But when he shot up a 100mg bag of heroin after two clean years, it was certainly the worst.

Fortunately, someone was on hand to revive him: he had injected the drug in the public lavatories at the Washington Heights Corner Project, a charity on the west side of Manhattan where staff monitor the washrooms for just such an emergency. Every five minutes there is a tap on the brightly coloured cubicle doors. If no one responds, a worker goes in, ready to administer an antidote if there has been an overdose.

"Thank God for them checking," said Danny, 35. "When I woke up, I felt the blankness. But then it kicked in: oh my god, I was just dead." Last year, the charity prevented 67 overdose deaths.

Safe injection facilities (SIF) such as the Corner Project, where drug users are supervised by medical professionals and provided with clean needles, are illegal under US federal law. Such is the gravity of America's drugs crisis, however, with 60,000 people dying of overdoses last year, that they are at the forefront of the drive to cut fatalities.

The authorities are increasingly turning a blind eye. Philadelphia announced this week that it would become the first American city to allow SIFs, and Boston, San Francisco and Denver may follow suit.

The popularity of places like the Corner Project proves that there is a need for them, said Liz Evans, the charity director. "Part of the reason people die is because they are hiding," she said. If addicts are going to use, the argument goes, it is better to reduce the likelihood that they will die.

Staff at the public libraries in Philadelphia and Washington carry naloxone, a medication that reverses

opioid overdose. In Boston, pub owners check lavatories regularly for overdosing addicts. In Baltimore, Rajani Gudlavalleti, a community organiser, said: "There are so many spaces in that grey zone, where people try to create a safer environment for consumption. They're everywhere already."

Legally sanctioned sites would be better, she added — and research seems to support her view. In Canada, fatal overdoses fell by 35 per cent over five years in the neighbourhood surrounding the first SIF in Vancouver compared with 9 per cent in the rest of the city.

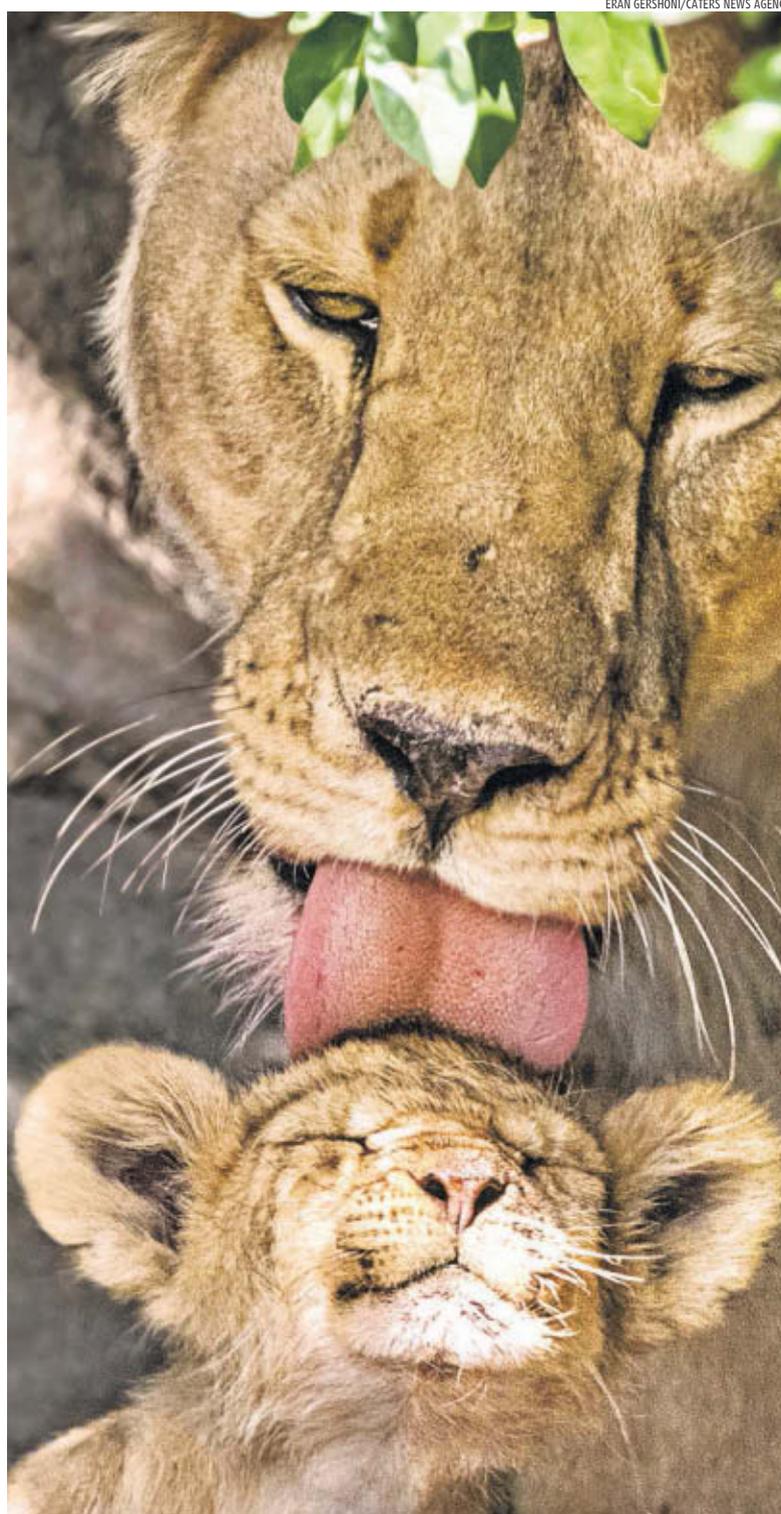
The first "fixing rooms", as they were initially known, appeared in the UK in the 1960s, and they now exist in ten other countries. With Americans overdosing on substances such as fentanyl, and even carfentanyl, a compound 10,000 times more potent than morphine, advocates say the US needs to embrace them urgently.

However, opponents say the idea is an implicit endorsement of drug use, and illegal. As with marijuana laws, states and cities that sanction SIFs could invite federal lawsuits.

Many taxpayers resent paying for needles and naloxone, and although the goal is to refer people who use SIFs to treatment centres, some addicts have no intention of getting clean.

Tish, 45, recalled the struggle her son Chris had with rehabilitation centres. "I signed him up into every rehab programme possible. He'd leave year after year," she said. "He worked to be free of addiction, but when he wasn't, he would go to the Corner Project. In the beginning I was sceptical. But if he's going to use, then there should be a place where he can use safely and be monitored."

The last time he injected, last autumn, after being drug-free for a year, the charity was closed. He went to the lavatories at a McDonald's near by. There, he overdosed and died.



A lick and a promise A lion cub appears to be enjoying a little pampering as its mother gives it a quick wash in the sunshine of Serengeti National Park, Tanzania

## 37 killed and 70 injured in A&E fire at hospital

Seoul At least 37 people died in a fire that started in the A&E unit of a hospital (Richard Lloyd Parry writes). More than 70 people were injured, nine critically, at Sejong Hospital in Miryang, about 170 miles southeast of Seoul. The fire burnt for three hours yesterday but did not spread above the ground floor, where 194 mainly elderly patients were being treated. Some patients survived by clinging on to a rope dangled from a helicopter. Others were carried out on the backs of staff or firefighters. It is South Korea's worst fire in 15 years and comes days before athletes and spectators begin to arrive for next month's Winter Olympics.

## Dutch start DNA drive to find campsite killer

The Hague Dutch police have asked 21,500 men to submit DNA in an attempt to resolve a 1998 murder. Nicky Verstappen, II, vanished from a summer camp at a nature reserve near the German border. His body was found the next evening. Police said the men, who lived near the reserve or in Nicky's village, were not suspects but that their DNA could show family links. (AFP)

## Worm threatens to kill off farming in Africa

Rome A crop-eating pest is spreading rapidly across Africa. The fall armyworm larva can feed on more than 80 plants and will soon be in every maize field on the continent, the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation said. It "poses a challenge to the survival of agriculture in Africa," Mark Green, head of the US Agency for International Development, said. (Reuters)

## Migrants drown after smugglers open fire

Geneva At least 30 African migrants drowned off the coast of Yemen in a boat operated by smugglers who are reported to have fired on passengers. Survivors reported that the overcrowded boat packed with about 100 Ethiopians and 50 Somalis left Aden for Djibouti on Tuesday but capsized, the International Organisation for Migration said. (Reuters)

## Boko Haram suspect arrested in Germany

Berlin A 27-year-old Nigerian suspected of being a member of Boko Haram and killing people in Nigeria during attacks on schools and a village has been arrested in Germany. Amaechi Fred O. was detained on Wednesday in Bavaria. He is accused of joining the jihadists in 2013 and taking part in several attacks, including taking girls hostage, during one year with the group. (Reuters)

## Zoo forced to shut by mass baboon breakout

Paris A keeper at Paris zoo thought that something had probably gone awry when he came across a baboon sauntering down a staff corridor. It was soon discovered that about 50 of them had broken out of their enclosure. The zoo was evacuated and the police and fire brigade were called to help catch them. The zoo said that none of the baboons managed to reach a public area.

# Hammer-fisted Trump is bungling fight against FBI

Rhys Blakely



WASHINGTON

During an impromptu press conference this week President Trump was asked whether he trusted the FBI. "Well, what am I going to say? I am very disturbed, as is ... everybody else that is intelligent," he replied.

He then flagged a theory that has swept through conservative media, that a "secret society" in the bureau plotted to topple his administration.

This was not the first time that Mr Trump had maligned the FBI. He has accused agents of treason and the FBI leadership of being corrupt. This week it emerged that last May he demanded to know whether the acting FBI director had voted for him in the presidential election.

The relationship has been uniquely antagonistic, experts say.

"No previous president has made public statements about the FBI like Trump," Timothy Naftali, a historian and former director of the Nixon presidential library, says. "His systematic belittling of members of the FBI leadership, his efforts to divide the leadership from what he calls the 'rank and file', his arguments that holdovers [from the Obama era] are conspiring against him — it's all unprecedented."

The special counsel investigating his campaign's links with Russia, Robert Mueller, who he tried to fire last June, is a former FBI director.

Earlier presidents they tended to fume in private — in large part because of the power the FBI has to scrutinise the commander-in-chief.

For half of its history, from 1924 until 1972, the bureau was run by J Edgar Hoover, whose collection of dirt provoked concerns that he was building his own secret police. Harry Truman, who prided himself on being the one man in Washington not to fear Hoover, feared in the 1940s that the FBI would become an American Gestapo.

Decades later John Kennedy occupied the Oval Office knowing

that the FBI had once bugged a hotel room where he and a suspected Nazi spy called Inga Arvad had, as Hoover's men dutifully recorded in their notes, "engaged in sexual intercourse on numerous occasions". Hoover, Kennedy snarled behind closed doors, was "a goddamned sewer".

FBI directors are now supposed to serve ten-year terms, to insulate them from political pressures and to prevent them building empires.

This has not stopped the agency from shaping the political landscape. It was a deputy chief of the bureau, Mark Felt, who fed *The Washington Post* information to fuel the Watergate scandal that toppled Richard Nixon. The reporters Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward gave him the codename Deep Throat.

In the 1980s the FBI built the Iran-Contra case against Ronald Reagan's national security staff. In the 1990s it ran the DNA tests that led Bill Clinton to be impeached for lying about a relationship with an intern. And it was an FBI director, James Comey, who publicly reactivated an investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails days before

the 2016 election, almost certainly hurting her in what turned out to be an astonishingly tight race.

This week the FBI was at the centre of a bewildering web of allegations. A Republican congressman, Devin Nunes, has prepared a memo that apparently draws on classified information to argue that it abused its power to spy on the Trump campaign. The Department of Justice warned that releasing the document would be "extraordinarily reckless".

Two FBI employees who were appalled by Mr Trump's campaign are known to have traded text messages criticising him, some of which may have gone missing. One, Peter Strzok, played a part in clearing Mrs Clinton of criminal wrongdoing over her emails. He was also also involved in Mr Mueller's Russia investigation.

The problem is Mr Trump is using a sledgehammer rather than a scalpel. His trampling of political norms raises questions over whether he is genuinely concerned about the FBI's integrity. If he believes that the agency is guilty of dirty tricks there are better ways to build a case.