In 1987, seven people died in the Chicago metro-

polis area after ingesting extra-strength Tylenol,

which had been deliberately contaminated with

potassium cyanide. Johnson & Johnson, the manufac-

turer, responded by pulling 31 million bottles of tablets

back from retailers, stopped all production and advertis-

ing of the product, got involved with the Chicago Police,

FBI, and TDA in the search for the killer, and offered

up to a $100,000 reward for information on the culpr

it. The company also permanently discontinued the cap-

sules and developed tamper-resistant “gel caps.”

The crisis cost the company more than $100 million,

but Tylenol eventually regained 181 percent of the mar-

ket share it had before the crisis. The media attributed

the length of the company went to and its concern for the

public interest, as the company was prepared generally

in a good light. It is a textbook example of how to

respond to a public relations crisis. Unfortunately, many

in higher education have yet to learn from this case.

In July of this year the Los Angeles Times published

a report that the dean of the medical school at the

University of Southern California, Carmen A. Puliafito,

had used illicit drugs and consorted with a prostitute

while in his administrative post. The media immedi-

ately connected Puliafito’s alleged drug use with his

research grants totaling more than $200 million. He was

settled an assault lawsuit and faced sexual harassment

practice lawsuits or disciplinary actions against him.

However, it was later revealed by The Chronicle of

Higher Education that while in Miami Puliafito had

assaulted a babysitter and faced sexual harassment

allegations.

At USC Puliafito oversaw a number of medical

students, thousands of professors and clinicians, and

research grants totaling more than $20 million. He had

connected with raising more than $5 billion for the school

and other causes. He was also a regular at star-studded

USC fundraisers with the Hollywood elite. His yearly

salary was $1.3 million.

Yet, he resigned under suspicious circumstances.

Not only was he firing a very high salary and a very

prestigious position, but also his investigation took place

in March, in the middle of a semester, a rarity in higher

education. His investigation began after articles from

that he went on sabbatical.

The real explanation was that the video footage and

photographs started to circulate in social media. In one

video posted on some Puliafito, wearing a towel, shows

an orange pill on his tongue. “Thought I’d take an Ecstasy

pill that day,” he told the camera, as he then swallows the

pill.

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