

The Post's View • Opinion

# The death of a young Montgomery County man is a wake-up call

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By **Editorial Board** December 17

FRANK SEPEHRI last saw his son the Saturday night of Dec. 9, headed out to a friend's house at 7 o'clock. That Navid Sepehri didn't want to drive the new car recently purchased for him was — in hindsight — an indication the 17-year-old planned to drink alcohol (and probably a lot of it). Other things — in hindsight — are clear about the tragic events of that night in Bethesda: that kids can't always be trusted to do what they promise; that adults need to be vigilant; that police should have done more. Above all, the lesson is that bad things can happen when friends don't look out for each other.

The death of this young Montgomery County man should serve as a wake-up call to the community — to parents, to teens and to authorities — about the need to do more in combating underage drinking.

Navid, a Walt Whitman High School senior, was found dead Dec. 10 in a patch of water in a wooded ravine by his father who had been searching for him after he had failed to come home. An autopsy report released Friday said he died from a combination of alcohol poisoning, drowning and hypothermia. The death was ruled accidental.

The boy was among a group who apparently crashed a party. After homeowners present at the party discovered uninvited guests, they ended the party and told teens to leave and call their parents for rides home. Police, responding to an anonymous call about underage drinking at the location, saw kids running away but talked to a group in the street that — investigation later revealed — included Navid.

According to police, the boy appeared to have been drinking but was upright, responding to officers and in the company of other boys who agreed to get him home. It appears Navid later broke away from the group, declining a ride booking in favor of walking home.

Police said there was no applicable civil or criminal charge that would have allowed them to take the boy into custody. Should they have done more? Why not call the boy's parents or make sure the group was safely headed home? Did police delay in starting a search, and would that have made a difference?

Police said they will conduct a thorough review of events, and it is important that conclusions about whether policies were followed — or whether they need changing — be shared with the public. It’s also important that parents and schools reinforce the dangers of underage drinking and that teens have a real understanding of the consequences.

As Montgomery County Police Chief J. Thomas Manger told us, “I think we as a community, including police, parents, lawmakers all need to look at these kind of tragedies and ask the question ‘what can we do better.’ ”

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