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DESIGNER DRUGS

Deaths associated with new designer drug 5-IT

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5-IT or 5-API is the common name for a newly emerging designer drug. It is a positional isomer of the tryptamine drug α-methyltryptamine and has the chemical structure (1H-indol-5-yl)propan-2-amine. Currently not controlled in Europe, it is covered, however, by the federal analogue acts in the USA and Australia.

Very little is known about the acute or chronic effects of 5-IT. An oral dose of 20 milligrams is said to produce long lived stimulant effects, including increased heart rate, anorexia, diuresis, and slight hyperthermia for about 12 hours.

Recently we identified 5-IT in postmortem blood samples of two young adults. The substance was found in combination with other drugs in one case. In the other, 5-APB/6-APB (a designer drug similar in some respects to the chemical structure of 3,4-methylenedioxymphetamine (MDA)) was also found. The National Board of Forensic Medicine in Sweden has recently identified the drug in 14 deaths and 5-IT was said to be the direct cause of death in two of these cases.

5-IT is inexpensive, easily available online as a so called research chemical and therefore has the potential for becoming a replacement for other recently banned designer drugs. The medical community should be aware of both the availability and use of 5-IT within the UK. The drug needs to be banned, but again regulatory control in the UK will be chasing designer drug innovation.

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Watson R. EU drug monitoring agency voices concerns over "legal highs". BMJ 2010;341:c6491.