

Buprenorphine...A New Street Drug?

Buprenorphine is approved for physician office-based opioid dependence treatment: for detoxification (short course, lowering doses) or maintenance therapy (long term, higher doses). It is a partial opioid agonist with a slow onset of action. It has very high binding affinity for the opioid receptor, but clinical effects are limited by a ceiling effect. It is currently available as Subutex[®] (buprenorphine 2 mg and 8 mg) and in combination with naloxone as Suboxone[®] (buprenorphine/naloxone 2 mg/0.5 mg and 8 mg/2 mg). Most of the buprenorphine being prescribed is Suboxone[®] to limit the abuse potential; however, the Maryland Poison Center has recently received several independent reports that buprenorphine is being sold on the street. The marketing scheme is "Try it...it's like methadone". It is most likely to be abused by untreated heroin addicts.

Suboxone[®] is orange, hexagonal, and has a sword logo on one side and N2 or N8 imprinted on the other side. The tablets are meant for sublingual use (bioavailability is poor following ingestion). The tablets are being sold on the street for \$20-\$30 each.

If buprenorphine is used sublingually in close proximity to the recent use of an opioid, it will precipitate withdrawal symptoms by displacing the opioid from its receptor. If buprenorphine is used after the appearance of withdrawal symptoms (i.e. after the opioid has left the receptor), the symptoms of opioid withdrawal will be diminished. If Suboxone[®] is crushed and used IV by an opioid abuser...prepare for a naloxone effect! Buprenorphine is safer in overdoses than other opioids. Respiratory depression has been reported but is less likely to occur.

For more information on buprenorphine, read the December 2003 issue of Toxalert at <http://mdpoison.com/Site/Publications/ToxAlertArch.htm>.

DID YOU KNOW THAT...the Maryland Poison Center received over 480 calls about proper food handling and suspected foodborne illnesses in 2003?

The CDC estimates that 76 million people are symptomatic as a result of foodborne illnesses each year. A primer on the "Diagnosis and Management of Foodborne Illnesses" for health professionals was published this month by the AMA and CDC. It includes detailed information on recognizing and treating foodborne illnesses from a variety of causes. It can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/rr/rr5304.pdf> or by visiting www.ama-assn.org and www.cdc.gov.



Post and share this edition of **toxtidbits** with your colleagues. Send any comments or questions to: **toxtidbits**, 410.706.7184 (fax) or Lbooze@rx.umaryland.edu.

If you do not wish to receive faxes or emails from the Maryland Poison Center, call 410.706.7604 or circle your fax number and fax this back to 410.706.7184. Supported by Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene