

EMERGING DRUG TRENDS AND HOMELESSNESS

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Introduction – what are we talking about?

- New, Novel, Legal highs, Club drugs etc...
- There isn't a term to cover them all, most of the drugs aren't new, not that novel they aren't all used in clubs or at parties and a lot of them aren't legal anymore.
- Unlike previous legal highs these work
- Increasing use in general and within the Homeless population

Aim

- To increase knowledge of emerging drugs in order to improve confidence in dealing with patients/clients who use them.
- Treat the person not the drug
- Single drug use is rare – Full Drug History

Content

- Drugs which are currently in use
- Cannabis and synthetic cannabinoids, Mephadrone, Ketamine
- Drugs with an increasing impact on homelessness
- Chemsex - G/GHB/GBL and Methamfetamines.

Cannabis

- In the 60s, cannabis never did anyone any harm at all...

- However, **these** days...
 1. We know more about it (links to psychotic illness)
 2. Modern Cannabis is a completely different beast

This is why....

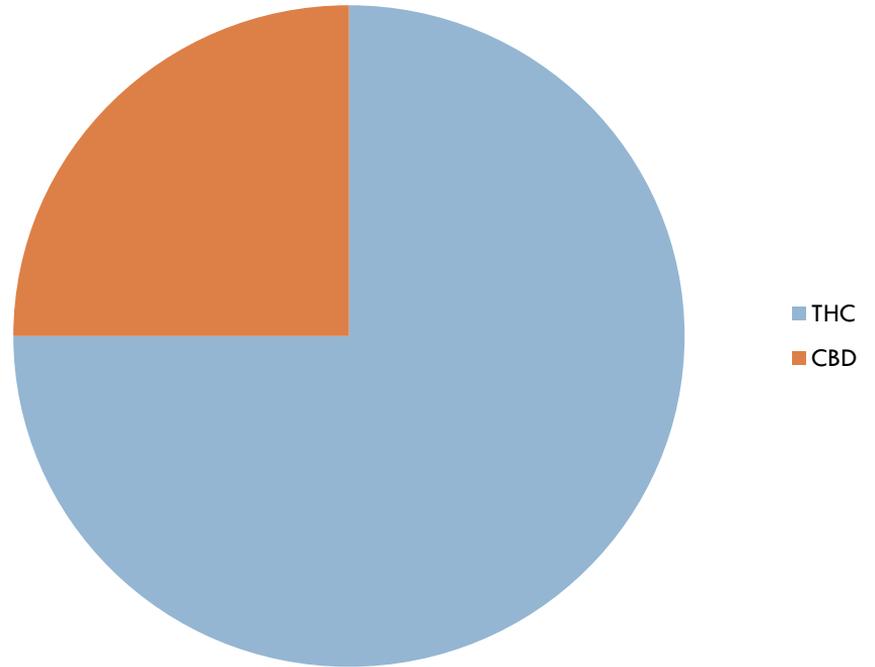
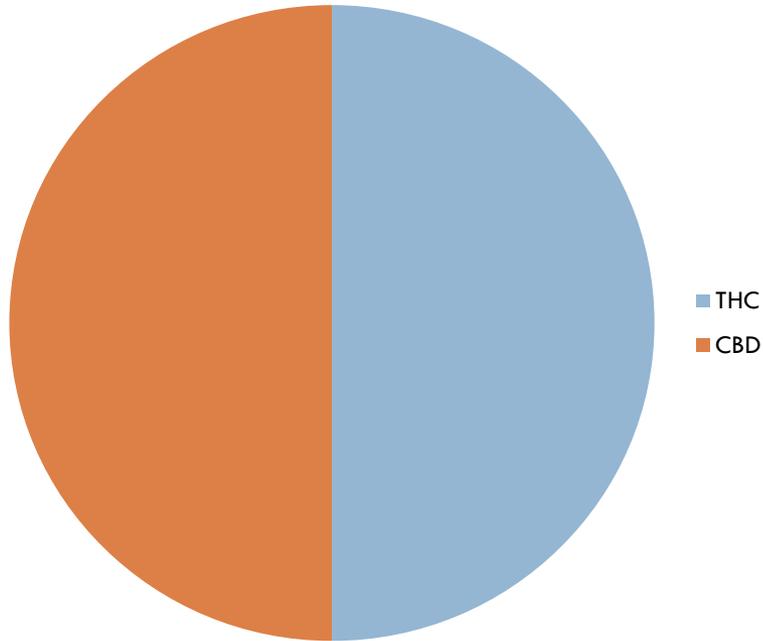
Cannabis contains two compounds*

- **Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)** – all the good effects
- Also, all the bad effects...
- (agitation, paranoia)

- **Cannabidiol (CBD)** – Reduces the bad effects
- Thought to be protective

- *Actually around 400 compounds

THC vs. CBD



Skunk

- As the THC increases the CBA is reduced
- Growers/ Importers/ dealers maximise THC to improve value and sales
- So modern cannabis is not the happy grass of the 60s

Synthetic cannabinoids

- ❑ Chemicals which mimic THC
- ❑ Often sprayed onto combustible leaf and sold like grass
- ❑ Cheap £5 a packet use is 1-2 packets daily
- ❑ This is NOT THC
- ❑ Pharmacology is not well understood
- ❑ The actual effects short-term and long-term are unknown

Anecdotal experience

- Really potent “head blown sideways”
- Increase in paranoia, aggression and agitation
- Possible increase in psychotic symptoms
- Users complain of depression and withdrawals
- Increased use in prisons – undetectable in drug screens

Mephadrone (Mkat. Meow) (1929)

- Most frequently injected of all the new drugs.
- New users and previous heroin injectors switching
- (it's cheap, relatively pure and easy to get hold of (until recently it was also legal).
- Heroin isn't as popular any more
- Mephadrone injectors report far more damage than other injectors, more track marks, abscesses and collapsed veins – this is likely to be a combination of new/ inexperienced injectors (without experienced peers) and the properties of the drug itself.

Mephadrone – what is it?

- Mephadrone is a cathinone – this is a stimulant somewhere between a lot of coffee (caffine is also a cathinone) and a bit of speed (amfetamines).
- Khat also contains cathinones.
- Mephadrone is an augmented cathinone - in the same way that ecstasy (MDMA) is mostly amfetamines, but not quite.

Mephadrone – how does it feel?

- Euphoria, stimulation and an increased sense of empathy. Short high but with long residual effects.
- Use also produces extremely strong cravings to use more and more – which encourages binging. A bit like crack does.
- There is an overlap in effect with Mephadrone, ecstasy and Methamfetamines, which isn't a surprise because chemically, they all look a bit alike.

Mephadrone

- Snort it or inject it
- Injectors usually report that their veins seem to go very quickly, they are more likely to get track marks and infections.
- Unlike heroin you can overcook meph and this causes it to thicken, making it more likely to clog veins.
- Rotating site is still advisable, but injectors will damage them all far more quickly.

Mephadrone

- Some of the side effect include
- Memory loss
- Confusion
- Parkinsonian symptoms – tremours

Ketamine (1963)

- This is a dissociative anesthetic, it numbs pain and causes feelings of being outside your body.
- Its used on **children** because it doesn't slow down heart rate or breathing. Its used on **horses** because it's really powerful and it's used for combat **trauma** because it doesn't interact with other medications and reduces PTSD.
- It's a very complicated drug...

Ketamine

- ... so you get very complicated users.
- There are of lots of different types of people who use ketamine for lots of different reasons.
- Ketamine used to be a staple of squat parties and didn't have much mainstream penetration.
- Some use it to enhance other “dance” drugs such as MDA or ecstasy – “bumping”.
- Some use it as a means to transcendental experience (out of body or spiritual reasons) – sometimes called Psychonauts.

Ketamine experience

- Effects are dose related (a single dose lasts around six hours)
- Users will time dosages
- Low doses are warm and fuzzy, users feel a little bit “out of it”, but doesn’t last very long (so require regular dosing).
- Higher doses people become disorientated, unable to stand up or walk properly (they can look very drunk – “wonking”). They maybe unaware of where they are, disorientated and difficult to communicate with.

Ketamine

- It can be injected (IV or IM), snorted or swallowed.
- It's not thought to be physically addictive – there aren't withdrawal symptoms as such, but users will have to recover from lack of sleep, not eating etc. People can become very reliant on it, use compulsively and have cravings (which all sounds a bit like dependence...)

Ketamine

- Tachyphylaxis “rapid protection” – Tolerance increases with each dose and isn’t fully lost.
- Frequent injecting, often forgetting when the last dose was.
- Encourage users to take small amounts, at regular intervals (using an alarm on their phone) to help manage the experience and to reduce tolerance developing.
- Higher tolerance = more use = more problems

K – Long term effects

- K cramps – very painful stomach cramps – which are only relieved by taking more ketamine
- K Bladder syndrome – Ulcers and scarring of the bladder reduce it's size and elasticity – it doesn't stretch so people can need to go to the toilet an awful lot. The person needs to stop using K. There is treatment for the symptoms but it's uncertain how much better it will get. They have to stop using

Ketamine overdose

- ❑ Users tend not to die from overdose but from accidents related to the other effects.
- ❑ **Disorientation** – walking into traffic, or commonly, drowning in the bath.
- ❑ **Disassociation** – seeing the situation as happening to someone else and not reacting.
- ❑ Ketamine doesn't mix well with alcohol which causes depression and sedation
- ❑ Ketamine is best taken on an empty stomach to avoid vomiting and choking

Chemsex

- Take drugs to enhance and prolong sex
- Chemsex parties can last for days, may take place between strangers and involve multiple partners and can include higher risk sexual practices.
- Its not usual for injecting equipment to be shared as part of the experience. Unprotected sex is common
- Deliberate risk taking is part of the experience.

- Sexual health, Drugs, health, mental state

Chemsex and homelessness

- Long come downs and hangovers
 - - hard to get to work – lose job
 - - Cause friction at home
 - - Expensive
 - - Addiction (drugs and sex)/ Dependence
 - Common causes of homelessness
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- We are starting to see Chemsex as a contributory factor in homelessness

Crystal – Methamphetamine(1893)*

*I don't think it looks right either... but that is the correct spelling.

It's a stimulant drugs so it has similarities with cocaine, but has several important differences too.

Cocaine	Methamphetamine
Short acting (about 50% will be removed from the body within one hour of use).	Long acting (about 50% will be removed from the body within twelve hour of use).
Blocks re-uptake of dopamine	Blocks re-uptake of dopamine and increases release of dopamine
Not thought to be neurotoxic (doesn't permanent damage brain cells)	Neurotoxic, (due large amounts of dopamine)effects parts of the brain controlling emotion
	NIDA (2013)

Methamphetamine

- Like all stimulants it encourages repetitive and compulsive behaviours.
- Unlike other stimulants it increases libido (cocaine does this in the short term, meth for much longer). It can prolong erections and thus sexual activity.
- It produces a massive increase in dopamine, which causes pleasure and contributes to compulsive and addictive behaviour in users.

Methamphetamine

- A white, bitter tasting, soluble powder.
- It's not usually blue.
- It also comes as white crystals or sometimes as tablets (Gaba).
- Snorted, or injected “slamming” or PR “booty bump”
- USA – Cheaper than crack
- UK – Historically Gay club scene, but not among other drug users or homeless people.

GHB/G/GBL (1874)

- Gamma-Hydroxybutyric acid(GHB/GBH) - illegal
- “G” or GBL (Gamma-Butyrolactone) is the precursor or pro-drug for GHB.
- Often sold as a degreasing agent online
- Cheap
- Calorie free intoxication without a hangover

GHB/G/GBL

- The simplest way to think about G is it's a bit like alcohol and a bit like benzodiazepines.
- Low doses produce euphoria, loss of inhibitions and increase sociability
- High doses can cause coma and death
- Its very addictive and sudden withdrawals can produce seizures (fits).
- It slows the body's ability to eliminate alcohol and increases respiratory depression.

Where can you get this stuff

- Dealer
- Head shops
- The internet – legal abroad or “research chemicals” or “not for human consumption”
- The dark web (Tor and bitcoins)

- Chemsex drugs are often brought by participants

Conclusion

- Not much research, not much experience
 - Some people are specifically sensitive to THC
 - Drug related hospital admissions and deaths
 - Methamphetamine is Neurotoxic (Dopamine toxicity)
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- We already know a lot about the consequences of taking too many drugs, injecting and we know a lot about unsafe sex.