Misuse of Pregabalin, Gabapentin and Baclofen in UK Men who have sex with men (MSM) clubbers

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INTRODUCTION

Pregabalin, gabapentin and baclofen produce central nervous system effects by interaction with GABA and/or GABA receptors.

There has been interest in internet discussion fora and in recent anecdotal reports to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) of pregabalin misuse. Baclofen is used in the treatment of gamma-hydroxybutyrate / gamma-butyrolactone (GHB/GBL) withdrawal and there are reports of users buying baclofen off the internet to self-treat GHB/GBL withdrawal. However, there is no data on the prevalence of misuse of these drugs in the United Kingdom.

The aim of this survey was to investigate misuse of these drugs in a clubbing cohort that have previously been shown to have a high prevalence of use of recreational drugs.

METHODS

We surveyed adults attending nightclubs catering for men who have sex with men (MSM) in South London over two consecutive weekends in June 2013.

Basic demographic data (age, sex, whether they had sex with men, women or both), together with data on whether individuals had heard of pregabalin, gabapentin and baclofen and if so whether they had ever misused them were collected.

Participants were classified MSM if they were male and had sex with men or both men and women.

RESULTS

Demographic data:

• 313 clubbers participated in this survey
• Mean ± SD age was 31.3 ±7.6 years
• 282 (90.1%) were male and of the male respondents, 248 (79.2%) were men who have sex with men (MSM)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prescribed Medicines</th>
<th>Heard (%)</th>
<th>Misused (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregabalin</td>
<td>28 (11.3%)</td>
<td>6 (2.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabapentin</td>
<td>26 (10.5%)</td>
<td>1 (0.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baclofen</td>
<td>32 (12.9%)</td>
<td>8 (3.2%)</td>
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Overall, 11 (4.4%) of the MSM clubbers had misused one or more of these three drugs in their lifetime.

Prevalence of recreational drug use in MSM population:

The prevalence of recreational drug use was high in this cohort:
• Last month use of mephedrone: 67.3%
• Last month use of gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB): 50.4%
• Last month use of cocaine: 43.2%

Source of supply for prescription medicines:

The chart below shows the number of respondents who self-reported the source where they obtained their prescription medicines (pregabalin, gabapentin and baclofen).

CONCLUSION

The results suggest that there is misuse of pregabalin, gabapentin and baclofen in a small, but significant proportion of this high drug-using MSM population.

Further work is required to determine whether this is more widespread and to further understand the routes of supply and motivations for use so that appropriate preventive strategies can be implemented.