

The Culprit Coffee Filter and Freezer

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This issue of AMM hosts an article new as to its theme in our journal. It focuses on a continuous risk imbedded in the medication submitted to the over the counter (OTC) regime. Some of the OTC drugs manufactured as combined analgesics contain NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) and codeine as phosphate salt. Codeine was used as a local anesthetic, to treat diarrhea, but mostly as a cure for cough. It is common knowledge that the use of codeine is largely spread to the extent that users often obtain it themselves from OTC drugs. The commonest method to extract codeine from pills containing combined analgesics is cold water extraction (CWE). One does not need extensive knowledge or special skills to extract codeine phosphate from OTC pills. The availability of information freely accessible on the Internet as to the methods to extract codeine is appalling. Over 1 690 000 entries on the net searched yesterday offered advice as to how best extract codeine from OTCs. As a matter of fact, it took less than a minute to quickly find an information source that updated me on the methods to extract recreational drugs. There was no warning as to the safety of the source. A coffee filter, a grinder and a freezer to obtain cold water appeared to be enough to extract codeine in less than 2 hours. I will not cite the source for I do not want to promote it. It looked like a handbook, and had content quite organized. I read not only methods to extract drugs, but also safety advice and warnings as how best to avoid toxicity. And it was not the only one. The author did not uncover his identity and I am sure that some of us will consider that warnings and method descriptions to extract those drugs would at least avoid unnecessary and possible lethal toxicity.

Croitoru MD et al aimed to investigate whether CWE could be used to extract codeine phosphate from the readily available OTC drugs in Romania [1].

Thus they performed high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) on the drugs assessed comparing the re-

sults to CWE of codeine. They managed to recover from 21 to 89 % of the codeine from the seven pharmaceutical products they tested. The NSAIDs and caffeine recovered scored variable values. The only difference between the methods promoted by the www and this research was the ultrasonication. Ultrasonic homogenizers used in laboratories cost between 2000 and over 4000 dollars. The authors tried to prevent identification of the products by the amount of codeine extracted. Nevertheless, the drugs tested are known. Their conclusion was that pharmaceutical companies should use codeine in a form that resists CWE extraction. They advance also the suggestion to alternatively use an ID document when purchasing the OTC products containing codeine.

Unfortunately codeine is not the only one drug largely used to get high and is not confined to pain medication. Promethazine-codeine cough syrup has been linked to the overdose deaths of a few famous rappers. Known in slang termes as purple drank, lean, sizzup and the list can go on, a concoction containing codeine and promethazine used to be popular among musicians. They mixed up cough syrup with alcohol and used to drink while performing. The liquid ingested contained over 25 times the recommended dose. According to the HIPHOP WIRED, the ruined lives amounted in 2014 to fifteen [2]. This is to say nothing of the not so prominent individuals.

Turning a blind eye to these problems would be deleterious. This way the featured article in our journal is a late but credible whistleblower to the National Agency of Drugs.

References

1. Croitoru MD, Fogarasi E, Erzsebet V et al. Could Codeine Containing OTC Analgesics Sold in Romania be Used as Recreational Drugs?. *Acta Medica Marisiensis*. 2016;62(3):309-312. DOI: 10.1515/amma-2016-0031.
2. www.HioHopWired

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