

Crap Drugs Labelled M.D.A. Offers Threat

by David McGaw

The writing of this short, but hopefully informative article, has been prompted by the death of a fifteen-year-old Kent County girl, presumably from an overdose of M.D.A. and by recent reports from Insight of "bad trips" from the same illicit drugs in the Fredericton area.

M.D.A. stands for 3,4-methylenedioxyamphetamine, a hallucinogenic amphetamine analog produced synthetically. It has no use in medicine and its pharmacological effects for short and long term usage are as yet unstudied. Amphetamine analogs are essentially chemicals with a basic amphetamine (speed) molecular structure but differing in the nature and position of various attached side-chains of atoms.

By changing the position and nature of the side-chain groups, many new compounds with varying properties can be formed. It is of interest to chemists and pharmacologists to determine and relate the properties of such analogs, and this is the scientific reason for their synthesis.

Prominent scientists in the study of amphetamine analogs are Alexander T. Shulgin of the Dow Chemical Company, Walnut Creek, California; Leo Hollister of Palo Alto, California; and J.R. Smythies of Scotland. They have synthesized and investigated a series of hallucinogenic amphetamine analogs that include M.D.A., M.M.D.A., T.M.A., and D.O.M. (S.T.P.). They have been studied clinically and found to have effects comparable to mescaline but the action of these compounds is reputed to be longer and they are considerably more potent than mescaline itself.

The hallucinogenic drug named by West Coast drug cultists as S.T.P. (serenity, tranquility, peace) was identified soon after its appearance in 1967 as Shulgin's recently discovered drug D.O.M. (2,5-dimethoxy-4-methylamphetamine).

Synder has demonstrated that pure D.O.M. (S.T.P.) is 50 times as potent as mescaline. In controlled experiment in normal male volunteers, low doses (2.7 to 3.3 milligrams) produced "subjective effects of mild euphoria and enhances self-awareness in the absence of hallucinogenic effects."

Yet, S.T.P. became known as a "Megahalucinogen" capable of inducing a trip of 3 to 5 days duration and perceptual distortions lasting much longer. Deaths were attributed to its misuse. Toxic signs were those of atropine poisoning - a classical delirium, with confusion, agita-

tion, disorientation, visual and tactile hallucinations.

The user's mouth was dry, his pupils widely dilated, and his skin dry and flushed. Fever completed the picture along with occasional muscle twitching and convulsions. Death was usually due to respiratory failure.

Subsequent experience suggests that the substance then in vogue was, more often than not, a composite of large doses Mescaline. D.O.M. in pure form may not be too harmful a drug but the mixture of ingredients sold on the street for it can be deadly. The same is true of M.D.A.

The United Nations Bulletin on Narcotics first identified M.D.A. use in its July-Sept 1968 issue. It was being sold as mescaline in the New York area. One clandestine laboratory was seized. In pure form M.D.A. should resemble brown sugar and is alleged to produce a particularly tranquil psychedelic experience.

In May 1969 the San Francisco based Rock Music Magazine Rolling Stone quoted, from an article by Shulgin "that M.D.A. in doses of 100 milligrams does not cause bad physical symptoms, disturbed thoughts, or visual hallucinations, but it did create a strong three dimensionality when listening to music as also occurs with hallucinogens like LSD". Illicit drug makers were urged to switch to the production of M.D.A. and end the synthesis of poisonous speed.

M.D.A. in reasonably pure state first appeared in the Fredericton area in the fall of 1968 and has reappeared at frequent intervals probably peaking in use during the summer of 1969. More and more often, however, its purity has become of questionable doubt. On analysis in Toronto and elsewhere some "street" samples sold as M.D.A. contained various mixtures of Methedrine, Amphetamine, Cocaine, and Atropine.

Insight Drug Aid director, Clayton Burns warns that the names M.D.A. and Mescaline are being used chiefly as labels to sell "crap" drugs in this area. Since he has no means of chemical analysis he can only speculate, but believes that the bad drug symptoms caused by these "crap" drugs indicate the presence of cocaine, belladonna alkaloids, and strychnine.

In late 1969, of 25 samples of supposed "mescaline" collected from "street" sources in Halifax, Montreal, and Toronto not one contained any mescaline on analysis. The mescaline contained various mixtures of LSD, Lactose

Methedrine, and ergot alkaloids.

To summarize, the inherent dangers in the use of M.D.A. are:

(1) It is impossible to obtain chemically pure M.D.A. because it has no medicinal use.

(2) Even if properly synthesized the drug would contain impurities caused by the low grade chemicals used in illicit labs and by other products formed in the chemical reactions which an underground lab could not separate.

(3) Statistical inferences indicate that one has a poor chance of buying true M.D.A. and can receive instead a mixture of harmful and possibly deadly chemicals.

(4) Adverse reactions to mixtures of unknown drugs are almost impossible to treat medically since the doctor does not know what drug he is trying to treat.

Frequent deaths from the use of such "crap" mixtures of dangerous drugs could be eliminated if drug aid centers such as Insight had access to analytical laboratories. The LeDain Commission has recommended the establishment of regional analytical laboratories at strategic points across the country.

In the meantime, they recommend arrangements be made were possible through universities and other agencies for the provision of lab facilities to render such service. The government, instead, has stopped those individuals who were concerned enough to undertake such projects. The LeDain Commission points out that in this risk-taking generation the young are going to continue to experiment with drugs, regardless of what we do.

It is better that they see the whole sordid picture of fraud, adulteration and cross commercial exploitation. In its own pretensions to idealism, the drug culture tends to conceal from itself the extent to which it has become infected with many of the evils which it deplors in the established society.

Sample analysis and wide dissemination of results can only serve in the long run to deglamourize drugs and drug-taking.

The federal government's inaction in this field is deplorable. It would seem to prefer the deaths of young drug users to the alternative of taking constructive preventive steps.

