

Students warned about cold remedies

OTTAWA (CUP)—College and university students are risking brain haemorrhages and heart failure during exam time by

gobbling a stimulant which is easy to buy on the street or over the counter in drug stores. Phenylpropanolamine or PPA

is one of several chemicals found in Black Beauties, and is also used in Contac C, Coricidin, Sinutab and other decongestants. The

drug shrinks blood vessels in the nose and elsewhere, eliminating congestion and raising blood pressure.

Dr. Bryan Young, a neurologist at Victoria Hospital in London, Ont., thinks the drug and another pseudo-ephedrine, are the cause of serious brain haemorrhages in four of his young patients in the past year. The patients included a high school student and a university student.

Young, also an assistant professor at the University of Western Ontario, said Black Beauties caused the problem in all four cases. But Young is worried university students taking large doses of cold medicine to stay awake could also have problems. London pharmacists say cold remedy sales skyrocket at exam time.

The drug is especially dangerous in quick release forms of the medicine and tablets which the blood stream absorbs much more quickly than the capsules, Young said.

In a recent U.S. experiment, 50 healthy medical students each took 50 mg of PPA. Two developed dangerously high blood pressure and needed emergency medical medication.

Antihistamines like Ornade, Ornex and Dimatab come in sustained release capsules. Others like coricidin are tablets containing 25 mg of PPA. Suggested maximum dosage is three a day. Sinuvit recommends taking one tablet every four hours. Each tablet contains 25 mg of PPA, "The maximum you would be exposed to is about 150 mg a day," said Jean Sattar, with public relations at Health and Welfare Canada.

"That drug is very available," Young said. "We've seen many

more problems with this than with harder drugs because it's so available."

Because the drug is not illegal, RCMP are unable to control it. "Kids know it's not illegal," said Corporal Douglas Wasstein of the London RCMP. "People walk around with a couple hundred (Black Beauties) in their pocket."

Wasstein said the drug can only be stopped at the border. "It's not scheduled as a control drug — if a shipment comes in with a dosage that is not appropriate, the government will seize it under federal food and drug laws," he said.

Canadian dealers buy Black Beauties by the hundreds from U.S. mail order companies and smuggle them into Canada. They are easy to get on most university and college campuses at exam time.

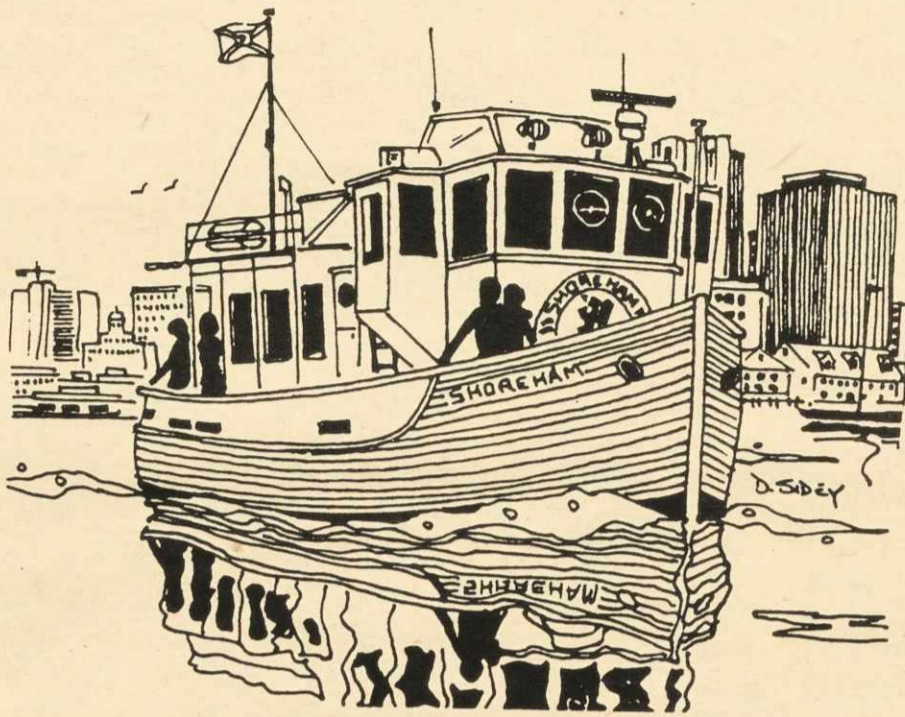
Robert Armstrong, assistant director of non-prescription drugs at Health and Welfare Canada in Ottawa, is not overly worried about PPA abuse. "It's legally used in cold remedies," he said.

"The instructions are there on the label," Armstrong said. "There's nothing else we can do if people are stupid enough to ignore them."

He insisted, however, that PPA as found in Black Beauties is not legal. "It's a drug and you cannot market a drug unless you have a drug identification number," Armstrong said. "We have not given it a number."

Armstrong admitted the drug was dangerous. "I have seen a person shake for six hours after taking one cold tablet," he said.

But he said the government discourages listing side effects of drugs on the labels, because they buy the drug to get the side effects.



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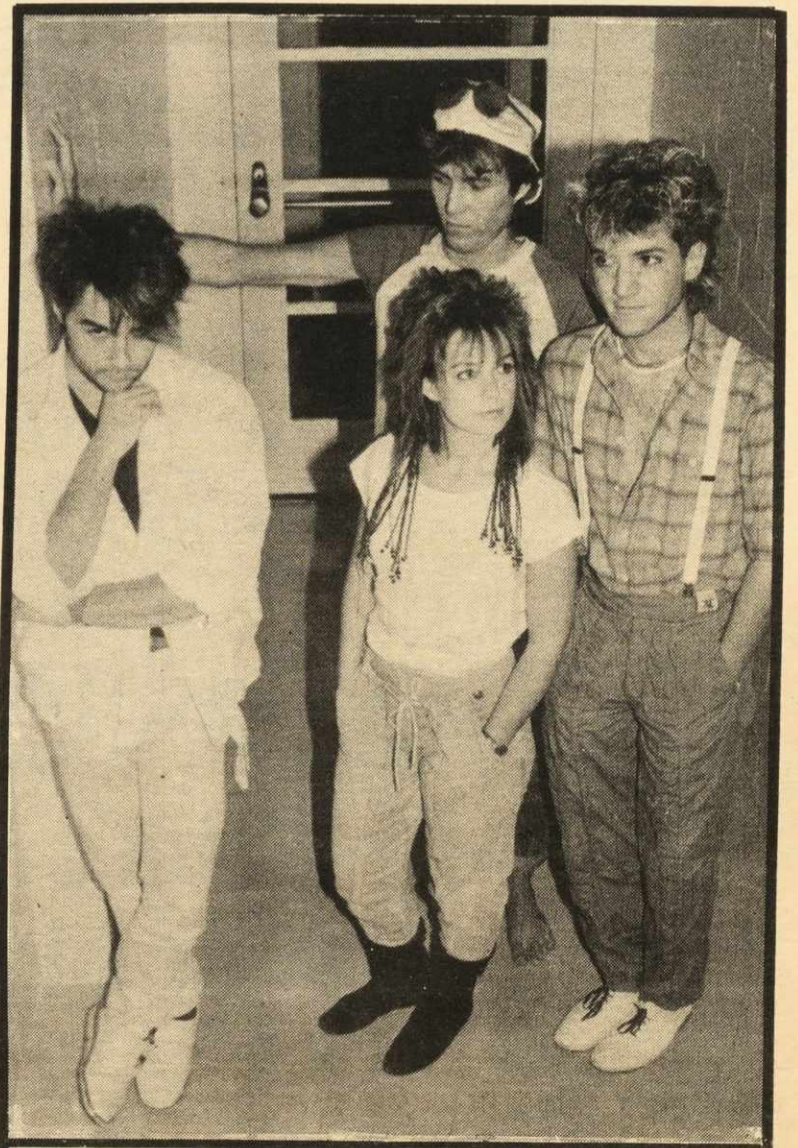
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