

Common sleeping pill has stunning dark side! MAY 12, 2014

By Dr G Sreekumar Menon

ZOLPIDEM, a commonly prescribed sleep medication in the USA has become a very popular Date - Rape drug. Zolpidem is commonplace in the USA, ranking 15th on the list of most-dispensed medications in 2012 with 43.8 million prescriptions, according to IMS Health. Zolpidem has become the most effective date-rape drugs since Rohypnol - "roofies" was outlawed in 1996, in the USA.

Zolpidem, a sedative used to treat insomnia, is easily dissolvable and difficult to detect. It is designed to make people go to sleep and quickly exit the body.

Zolpidem generally is not detectable in alleged victims through blood or urine tests more than a day or two after a single exposure, though that can vary depending on the person, the dosage and testing limits. Hair testing can detect it longer but that will be difficult if there's only been one small dosage.

The short testing window, as well as the drug's legality, complicates the criminal cases. Women cannot recall much of what happened because of the amnesia-like effect of the drug.

Rohypnol had a similar effect and became known as the "forget pill." It was banned for importation in 1996 after it emerged as a tool for date rapists, who often slipped it into the drinks of their victims to knock them unconscious. GHB was used the same way and was banned in the USA in 1990 before being approved in 2002 to treat narcolepsy. But zolpidem is a prevalent prescription drug and, therefore, easier to obtain for illegal use. It was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in 1992 and soon became a popular remedy for insomniacs, even though its official guidelines have changed in response to reports of adverse effects on users.

FDA guidelines warn zolpidem users that they might *"get out of bed while not being fully awake and do an activity that you do not know you are doing. The next morning you may not remember that you did anything during the night."* Reported activities include: driving a car, making and eating food, talking on the phone & having sex.

The FDA notified manufacturers to cut in half the recommended zolpidem dosage for women, who generally metabolize the drug more slowly than men. From 2005 to 2010, the number of female visits to emergency rooms involving zolpidem increased from 3,527 to 13,130 – double the number for men, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Long term side effects can include withdrawal agitation, sleep interruption, depression, poor peak performance and focal amnesia. To a sexual predator, zolpidem holds appeal: Not only can the drug be possessed legally with a prescription, it also can knock a woman unconscious and leave her unable to know or remember what happened. The perpetrator has two things going for him to start off with, *"One is the half-life of the drug (which makes it hard to detect after a day or two), and the other is there are no eyewitnesses"*.

Zolpidem generic is manufactured in India by more than 40 companies. Some of the manufacturers of Zolpidem include ZydusCadila Healthcare Ltd, Unimarck Healthcare Ltd, Unichem Laboratories Ltd, Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., Nicholas Piramal

India Ltd. etc.

The US Customs and Border Protection (CBP), working in conjunction with the Zollkriminalamt (German's Customs Investigation Bureau), have seized a shipment of around 20,000 pills of Zolpidem, with several parcels apparently originating from India.

This seizure indicates that export controls on the Indian side need to be strengthened. Also, various enforcement agencies in India should focus on crimes related to misuse of Zolpidem.

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