

New wave: Exploring emerging drugs from clinical and consumer perspectives

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Abstract:

Use of novel substances is increasingly reported across Australia, with variable harms detected. This presentation will review recent reports of emerging drugs and harms, and outline health care response approaches. A range of novel opioids, stimulants, benzodiazepines, psychedelics and ketamine analogues have been reported. Overdoses related to synthetic opioids, particularly nitazenes, are increasingly reported. Reports have been sourced from community and health care settings. Public health systems for sharing information with clinicians and consumers locally and between jurisdictions are being established. Efforts to enhance laboratory analysis of substances within the health care system (once harms have occurred) are being enhanced by testing capacity in the community (prior to drug consumption). Emerging drug checking data suggest that many drugs are not what was expected, and that consumers use the information provided to make informed health promoting decisions. Response to synthetic opioids includes health messaging, naloxone distribution, emergency overdose care, as well as opioid use disorder treatment for those who might benefit, and needs strengthening. In an unregulated drug market, access to reliable laboratory analysis, timely information dissemination, effective health promotion messaging, and prompt access to effective treatment of acute and chronic health harms developed with consumer expertise are key components of the health care response to emerging harms from the use of novel drugs.