

Abuse potential : a real-life settings approach for prescription drugs

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The abuse potential of a drug in real life settings, which is of primary importance to define drug policies, is dependant of its intrinsic properties but also of external factors (availability, price, regulatory status, trends...). The intrinsic abuse potential of drugs can be assessed in experimental conditions (both for animals and humans) by several well-described methods. Reliable pharmacoepidemiological methods to measure abuse potential in real life conditions are still lacking. Doctor shopping (the use of prescription from several physicians by a patient to obtain drugs) is a behaviour adopted by some patients addicted to prescription drugs. Our hypothesis is that doctor shopping can be used as a reliable proxy measure for abuse potential of prescription drugs in real life settings. We developed an original method to measure doctor shopping, using the prescription database of French Health Insurance Scheme. We first tested our hypothesis with a long term follow up of high dosage buprenorphine (HDB, a maintenance treatment for opiates dependence) from 2000 to 2005, that shown an increase of doctor shopping for this drug from 2000 to 2004 and a slight decrease concomitant with regulatory measures. We also compared doctor shopping for different drugs among the class of benzodiazepines showing an influence of molecule and dosage form on abuse potential.