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INCB ANNUAL REPORT
Background Note No. 3

Release Date: 4 March 1997

Stimulants Peddled as 'Miracle Diet Pills'

Among the general concerns given special attention in the latest report of the International Narcotics Control Board is renewed demand for "weight-reducing tablets" containing amphetamine-type stimulants, that are being marketed as a "quick fix" for obesity. The recent upswing in consumption of these prescription drugs is fueled not only by promotional features in the media and the Internet but also by the attraction of the preparations' stimulant effects.

Abuse of appetite suppressants for their stimulant properties has been reported in a number of countries around the world, as has been the diversion of such tablets to illicit markets and their smuggling from country to country. The Board received reports citing health clubs, fashion shops and beauty farms as places where such drugs can be illicitly obtained.

Although advertising of controlled pharmaceuticals to the general public is prohibited under article 10 of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, the Board is concerned that some medical practitioners and weight-reduction clinics in the United States are using the Internet to push a preparation containing phentermine -- a stimulant classified in Schedule IV of the 1971 Convention -- in combination with another preparation containing fenfluramine -- a substance not under international control. The combination is popularly known as "fen/phen".

Governments Concerned

In the Americas -- particularly in Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the United States -- appetite-reducing preparations containing stimulants under international control are consumed in much higher quantities than in other regions. Some Latin American Governments have expressed concern at the large-scale dispensing of this type of "diet pill", frequently in combination with other drugs affecting the central nervous system. The latter include benzodiazepines such as Valium® and Librium®, which are also subject to treaty restrictions.

The present trend represents a "come-back" for amphetamine-type stimulants, and today's versions are akin to those prescribed as appetite suppressants in the 1960s and 1970s, which have contributed to the present world-wide boom in illicitly manufactured stimulants. The chain of events went from promotion of amphetamines as "diet pills", increased demand for licit amphetamines, a tightening of restrictions on licit supply, production of amphetamine-type drugs in clandestine laboratories to meet the illicit demand -- up to the present craze for "speed", "Ecstasy" and other synthetic stimulants.

Dangers

The substances concerned are addictive. Adverse reactions to amphetamine-type stimulants range from elevated blood pressure to violent behaviour and paranoia.

Due to their abuse potential and possible adverse reactions, amphetamine-type anorectics are no longer recommended in most countries for the treatment of obesity, except in severe cases and for limited time periods.

Action Required

Brazil and Chile have adopted new measures to prevent the misuse of prescription preparations, and Chile has already reported a recent decline in the use of anorectics.

The Board requests all Governments to adhere strictly to the treaty provisions that restrict advertising of such substances and encourages the media in all countries to promote a more responsible attitude to the use of stimulants as appetite suppressants. It also urges Governments to act to stop the diversion of anorectics from licit channels in order to prevent the further development of illicit markets for these stimulants.

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beginning 4 March 1997