

COMPETITIVE PROBLEMS IN THE DRUG INDUSTRY 16581

The aforementioned study commissioned by the Justice Department provided an analysis of drug-associated fatalities reported in the DAWN system* from July 1973 to September 1975. This analysis showed that DPX was involved in 1,221 deaths, second only to heroin. Furthermore, DPX displayed the greatest relative toxicity of all the drugs reported in the DAWN system. One measure of toxicity utilized was deaths per 1000 emergency room mentions of the drug in the DAWN statistics as compiled in a Department of Justice study on DPX abuse.³¹ Reports from coroner's offices of drug-related deaths divided by the number of mentions for the same drug in the DAWN emergency room network showed that DPX was the highest of any drug with 113 coroner-reported deaths for every 1000 emergency room mentions. It ranked ahead of heroin/morphine(98) diazepam (valium)(18) and phenobarbital (104).

Another index of its fatal toxicity as a function of how often it is prescribed can be found by dividing the number of deaths by the number of prescriptions for the drug. Again, DPX outranked all prescription drugs(including diazepam) in the same study.³²

Why is DPX so toxic? As with other narcotics, it can cause pulmonary edema (fluid accumulation in the lungs) and respiratory depression which can frequently result in fatal respiratory arrest.³³⁻³⁶ In addition, DPX and its metabolites can depress electrical conduction in heart muscles which can result in arrhythmias and cardiac arrest.**³⁷⁻⁴⁸ Fatalities among those using the drug for its psychic effects are due to the small margin of safety between toxic doses and those required to achieve euphoria.^{49,50}

* Drug Abuse Warning Network, a Drug Enforcement Administration program then operating in 46 states. The statistics cover reports from hospital emergency rooms and from medical examiners (i.e. coroners), who had submitted reports at least 90% of possible reporting days during the life of the DAWN program.

** Specifically atrioventricular nodal conduction. The implication of this important finding is that persons with underlying cardiac disease who take DPX even at prescribed doses may inadvertently trigger an arrhythmia culminating in cardiac arrest.