

OPINIONS

There are at least 1,200 deaths a year in the United States due to propoxyphene. The majority of these are suicidal overdoses from about 12 or more tablets or capsules obtained by a legal prescription. The average prescription is for about 30 dose units.

Propoxyphene was present in the majority of our cases in sufficient concentrations to cause death even if the other drugs found were not present.

Deaths would have been attributed to the drug earlier and even now more frequently if adequate toxicological analyses were available.

Determination that death is caused by a drug should only be made when sufficient concentration of the drug is found in appropriate specimens and no other adequate explanation for death is found.

Propoxyphene is a narcotic, opiate, central nervous system depressant, analgesic of questionable value.

Aspirin, acetaminophen or codeine are much safer and appear to be sufficiently effective.

Senator NELSON. Our next witness is Dr. Larry V. Lewman, forensic pathologist, Multnomah County, Oreg., medical examiner.

You are last on the panel. I am sorry you had to wait so long.

**STATEMENT OF LARRY V. LEWMAN, M.D., FORENSIC PATHOLOGIST,
MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREG., MEDICAL EXAMINER**

Dr. LEWMAN. My name is Larry V. Lewman; I am a physician; my specialty field of practice is forensic pathology.

My current responsibility is to investigate unexplained deaths throughout the State of Oregon, under the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Law.

I am Board certified in both anatomic and forensic pathology and my training, duties, and responsibilities similar to Dr. Hudson's.

The State of Oregon has experience, since the mid-1970's, an increase in propoxyphene deaths that could best be characterized as alarming.

It is now the No. 1 cause of drug overdose death in the State of Oregon and has been for the last 3 years.

During the past 3 years, propoxyphene deaths have equaled or exceeded the combined total of deaths from barbiturates and heroin.

The largest number of deaths attributed to this drug was 39 from July 1977 to July 1978.

There is a population of approximately 2 million in Oregon, and this represents an incidence rate of about 2 per 100,000 population.

The figure by itself does not mean much, unless you compare it with something. I will compare it with the homicide rate as everybody understands murder.

Depending where you go in the State of Oregon; the rural communities or the city of Portland, the rate of death from propoxyphene varies from between one-third to a little less than one-half the homicide rate. Slightly less than half as many people die from propoxyphene as die from homicidal violence.

Our statistics are, I think, as accurate as any in the country and far more accurate than most.

We have a Statewide medical examiner system. These deaths are investigated by physicians, and are under the statewide control of two forensic pathologists. We have a toxicology setup that is as good as any on the west coast or in the country for that matter, to chemically analyze autopsy specimens.