

It has been asserted that the number of deaths caused by propoxyphene is now greater than those from heroin. This question was addressed at each of the study sites. At most sites this is simply not true; and in those areas where propoxyphene is detected in unexplained death cases with greater frequency than heroin (morphine) this is clearly a function of the dramatic reduction in heroin fatalities in almost all areas of the United States since 1976 and not related to a supposed increase in propoxyphene cases. Again, this points to a need for careful examination of individual cases before general, epidemiological inferences are drawn.

The report (and this statement) certainly do not exonerate propoxyphene as a safe drug; it is of major concern to all toxicologists. There is no absolutely safe drug, and it is irresponsible to condemn a valuable pharmacological agent before accurate data are available to place its adverse effects in perspective with those of other similar drugs, and current forensic and clinical toxicology experience.

Several questions must be addressed: Most victims are suicides; can legislation prevent suicidal ingestion of multiple drugs? What needs to be done to better understand the toxicology of multiple drug usage? Research is desperately needed in this area. What is the role of alcohol (THE drug of abuse and death) in combination with propoxyphene? If this analgesic is removed from medical use what will take its place? Are