Recreational Use of Bupropion (Wellbutrin®; Zyban®)

Bupropion (Wellbutrin®; Zyban®) is an antidepressant and is used to treat a variety of conditions including depression, other mental/mood disorders and smoking cessation.

Manufactured by GlaxoSmithKline, bupropion was first marketed as the anti-depressant Wellbutrin®, and later re-launched as Zyban®, a smoking-cessation aid. The two (2) drugs share an identical chemical structure and were differentiated only for marketing reasons. [http://www.cmaj.ca/content/169/11/1202.1.full](http://www.cmaj.ca/content/169/11/1202.1.full)

Brand names in Canada: (from “Up to Date” database available on the PCHA intranet)

- Ava-Bupropion SR;
- Bupropion SR;
- Mylan-Bupropion XL;
- Novo-Bupropion SR;
- PMS-Bupropion SR;
- ratio-Bupropion SR;
- Sandoz-Bupropion SR;
- Wellbutrin SR;
- Wellbutrin XL;
- Zyban

Recreational users of bupropion crush the pills and inject or inhale the drug to achieve what has been described as a crack cocaine-like “high”, however some individuals report a less intense effect. The duration of the “high” is relatively brief and it is common for other drugs to be ingested simultaneously (e.g. – mixed with crack cocaine; alcohol). Anecdotal reports also suggest bupropion may be mixed with other medications such as hydromorphone, as it gives an amphetamine like feeling to counter the sedative effects of narcotics.

Injecting the crushed bupropion pills may result in a host of unpleasant side effects, and can lead to death. The link below is an alert issued in Ontario by the Interim Chief Coroner’s Alert to Ontario Physicians and Pharmacists:

This information was also summarized in a 2013 newsletter of the Nova Scotia College of Family Physicians:

**Lethal Consequences to Recreational Use of Bupropion (Wellbutrin®; Zyban®) through inhalation and/or injection**

Dr. Dan Cass, Interim Chief Coroner for Ontario, is alerting Ontario physicians, particularly family physicians, emergency physicians, psychiatrists, as well as pharmacists, of the potential lethal consequences of the recreational use of bupropion through atypical routes.

The Office of the Chief Coroner is aware of at least six cases in which the recreational use of bupropion by inhalation or injection was a causative factor in the death. In these cases, bupropion was injected or inhaled alone or in combination with other illicit or prescribed drugs. Injection use may be associated with significant tissue necrosis at the injection site, leading to death in some cases.

A public safety risk appears to be emerging. Physicians and pharmacists should be aware of the potential for recreational use of bupropion via inhalation or injection when considering prescribing and/or dispensing this medication, and when treating patients presenting with complications of use via these atypical routes.

From: [http://www.nsfamdocs.com/](http://www.nsfamdocs.com/)

Injecting bupropion can cause damage at the injection site including: tissue damage; skin abscesses; collapsed veins; and clogged arteries. This graphic photo shows the damage at the injection site: (click to open)

Copy the link below to your browser to launch a PREZI presentation created by Dr. James Truong, North Bay Regional Health Centre, North Bay, Ont.


Addiction Services has had reports of the recreational use of bupropion from clients in the Withdrawal Management Unit in Pictou, as have our withdrawal management colleagues in other areas of the province; however we have no formal data at this point.