Buprenorphine Abuse in Singapore
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Buprenorphine, a semi-synthetic opiate derived from thebaine, has both analgesic and combined opioid agonist-antagonist properties. In recent years, buprenorphine has received increasing popularity as an alternative to methadone in the treatment of opiate addiction by preventing withdrawal symptoms from heroin and other opiates. It was marketed in Singapore on 3 Feb 2000 as a prescription drug under the brand name “Subutex” (buprenorphine HCl, sublingual tablets). Currently, buprenorphine is not a controlled drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act in Singapore.

The first buprenorphine exhibit was received by the laboratory in May 2003. The number of buprenorphine exhibits has increased profoundly from 48 in 2003 to 232 in 2004. The buprenorphine exhibits came in the form of tablets, liquids and powdery substance. The powdery exhibits were generally encountered in straws, paper wrappings and syringes. Occasionally, the powdery substance was also found to contain diamorphine or benzodiazepines such as midazolam and nitrazepam. Half of the buprenorphine-containing liquid exhibits received by the laboratory were also found to contain midazolam. A common method of administration is via intravenous injection as buprenorphine stains were found on syringes and burnt spoons.

This poster discusses the abuse trend of buprenorphine and the possible reasons for its popularity.

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