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BOOK REVIEW

Drugs and Society

SHANKAR R

Address for correspondence:

Dr. P. Ravi Shankar

Department of Clinical Pharmacology & Therapeutics

KIST Medical College

P.O. Box 14142

Imadol, Lalitpur

E-mail: ravi.dr.shankar@gmail.com

Drug abuse is fast becoming a major problem in South Asia. Newer and more potent drugs of abuse are becoming available, and the geographical proximity to the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle makes South Asia especially vulnerable. Drug abuse is closely linked to the rising prevalence of HIV and Hepatitis B.

This book aims to educate students of the health sciences on the impact of drug abuse on the lives of ordinary people, and is the result of a collaborative venture between pharmacologists and sociologists. Clinicians have also contributed. Each chapter includes a number of unique features including 'Holding the line', 'Case in Point', 'Here and Now', 'Point/Counterpoint' and 'Learning Objectives'. 'Holding the line' details the efforts of the United States (US) Government to deal with drug abuse. 'Case in point' and 'Here and Now' illustrate the clinical, social and personal consequences of drug abuse. The learning objectives describe what the learner would be able to do on completing a particular chapter.

Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the book. Various terms linked to drugs and drug abuse is defined. The table detailing the slang drug terms is very interesting. The extent of, and the implications of drug use in society has been comprehensively discussed. The classification of users into experimenters, compulsive users and hoarders is interesting.

The second chapter tries to explain drug use and abuse. The major theoretical explanations of addiction have been covered from both

biological and sociological perspectives. The discussion questions in this chapter, like in others, try to make the learner think about various points. The list of comprehensive references at the end of the chapter serves a guide to further reading for the interested student.

Drug use, regulation and the law is the focus of the third chapter. Governments all over the world have recognized the problem of drug use, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of the United States (US) has tried to regulate drug use. The various US legislations which have tried to regulate drug use are mentioned. These may not however be of much interest for readers outside the US. The chapter ends with a section on pragmatic drug policies. Governments around the world have tried a coercive and an educative approach to curb drug use. The ideal may be a mixture of these two approaches, tailored to individual requirements.

'Homeostatic Systems and Drugs', is the area covered in the fourth chapter. The action of drugs of addiction on the neuron has been explained using simple line diagrams. I especially liked the simple explanations of the central nervous system (CNS) and the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The fifth chapter talks about 'How and why drugs work'... Various aspects of clinical and basic pharmacology are covered. Dose-response relationship, margin of safety, drug antagonism and additive effects, are described. The inhalational and the intravenous route have the quickest onset of action. The adaptive processes which take place in the body on chronic use of drugs have been well described.

From the sixth chapter onwards, various types of drugs have been covered in detail. The description starts with the CNS depressants and the class of sedative-hypnotics. The benzodiazepines, the barbiturates and the non-benzodiazepines have been covered in some

detail. The seventh chapter deals with a commonly abused drug all over the world, called alcohol. The description is detailed, but is again mainly from a US perspective. The next chapter continues to study alcohol mainly from a behavioural perspective. Cultural influences on alcohol use and the differences in the definition of alcoholics in various countries and cultures are interesting.

Narcotics or opioids starts with the description of the history of opium, which for centuries, was the most commonly abused narcotic. The stimulants form the focus of a separate chapter. Amphetamines and 'designer' amphetamines are the main CNS stimulants. Cocaine and ecstasy are the other major stimulants. The commonly consumed beverages, coffee and tea contain minor stimulants.

Tobacco is another commonly used drug of abuse. The estimate of the World Health Organization is that, by the year 2030, tobacco will kill around 30 million people a year worldwide. With the saturation of markets in the developed west, tobacco companies are increasingly concentrating on the developing countries. Hallucinogens or psychedelics became very popular in America during the 1960s, and were one of the features of the 'hippie' culture. LSD or acid was used to transcend the normal human experience. Marijuana is a commonly used drug, and is legal in many cultures. The chapter on 'Marijuana' addresses many of the features of this drug.

Inhalants are commonly abused by street children in the third world countries because of their easy availability. Over the counter (OTC), prescription and herbal drugs is the focus of the fifteenth chapter. Many drugs are available OTC in South Asia. Use of these drugs by an ignorant and ill-informed population can lead to various problems. However, the book, like in other chapters, presents only the US perspective. Herbs are commonly supposed to be safe by the lay population. However, this may not strictly be

908 d herbal medicines can lead to severe toxicity.

'Drug use within major subcultures' talks about drug use among athletes, women, adolescents, college students, and briefly touches on the internet as a promoter of drug abuse. This chapter, I felt, has comprehensively covered various aspects of drug use. A more international perspective would however have been more useful.

Drug prevention programs have been covered under the three levels of primary, secondary and tertiary. Various alternatives for a drug abuser make for interesting reading. Certain pharmacological approaches to treatment, especially in the United States, have been covered in some detail. However, as a clinical pharmacologist, I felt that more detail would have been helpful.

The appendix describes various Federal agencies with drug abuse missions, and in a tabular form, summarizes various drugs of use and abuse. The index is comprehensive. The book has supplements called 'Student Note-Taking Guide' and 'Instructor's ToolKit'. There is also an eLearning website (<http://drugsandsociety.jbpub.com>) which provides chapter summaries, discussion questions, animated flashcards, practice quizzes and crossword puzzles among others.

The book would be a useful addition to the libraries of medical students, other health science students and practicing doctors. A more international focus would make this book more interesting

About the book:

Hanson GR, Venturelli PJ, Fleckenstein AE. Drugs and Society Eight edition. Jones and Bartlett Publishers Sudbury, Massachusetts 2004. ISBN 0-7637-0758-9.