

References

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- JOUVENT, R., LECRUBIER, Y., PUECH, A. J., SIMON, P. & WIDLOCHER, D. (1980) Antimanic effect of clonidine. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, **137**, 1275–1276.

Khat-Induced Paranoid Psychosis

SIR: Gough & Cookson (*Journal*, June 1987, **150**, 875–876) mention that khat had caused psychosis in their patient as the urine screen was positive for amphetamines. It is evident that the authors use the word “amphetamines” to refer to phenylalkylamines, as otherwise they would have been more specific. This implies that the test was non-specific and could have been positive for many other compounds which are in common use, for example as cough remedies. It is true that the two important active chemical constituents in khat, cathinone and d-norpseudoephedrine (DNE), which are responsible for the euphoriant properties, are both phenylalkylamines.

Our contention is that it would not be possible to differentiate cathinone and DNE from other amphetamine-like compounds in the routine urine screen for amphetamines, but a more definitive testing using chromatographic techniques would yield conclusive results. Cathinone is easily hydroxylated to form l-norpseudoephedrine and DNE in the body. The relative proportions of cathinone and norpseudoephedrine in urine may indicate the time interval between khat chewing and their excretion in the urine. Khat users would, as a matter of habit, continue to chew it, and a follow-up of the patient may yield conclusive results.

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SIR: We never suggested that “khat had caused psychosis” in our patient because the urine drug screen was positive for amphetamines, merely that this result was to be expected in view of the chemical constituents in khat. We would refer the authors to the original report (Gough & Cookson, 1984), in which the case was discussed in detail and the type of assay used specified. The patient was observed at home prior to admission actually chewing the leaves, which were identified as khat by a Regional Drug Information Centre.

Our previous letter was prompted by Critchlow & Seifert's case report (*Journal*, February 1987, **150**,

247–249), where a urine drug screen was positive for morphine and dihydrocodeine but negative for amphetamines, which is not in keeping with a diagnosis of khat-induced psychosis.

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Reference

- GOUGH, S. P. & COOKSON, I. B. (1984) Khat-induced schizophreniform psychosis in the UK. *The Lancet*, *i*, 455.

Psychiatry and Glasnost

SIR: At the recent Regional (European) Conference of the World Association for Social Psychiatry (WASP) held in Budapest, Hungary (13–15 November), Professor Modest Kabanov of Leningrad highlighted changes in attitude stemming in part from Glasnost.

The concerns about Soviet psychiatry and allegations of its misuse are now taken seriously by Soviet academics and the Government, leading to open discussion in the press and other media. One such example was a detailed article in *Izvestia*, “In defence of the unprotected mentally ill”, on 10 July, 1987. This stimulated the open-minded investigation and review of cases by independent committees, one of which was headed by Professor Kabanov. This appears to be a new development and not dissimilar to the mental health tribunal mechanism prevailing in England.

Professor Kabanov went on to describe new legislation procedures and guidelines currently being considered and soon to be implemented which will mitigate against incorrect diagnosis and the inappropriate use of psychiatry. Incorporated in this is the concept of independent assessment, including a possible contribution from foreign academics. In Leningrad these changes have already been effected, helped by the initiative of Professor Kabanov. Hopefully they will become accepted and generally implemented throughout the USSR.

Professor Kabanov concluded by stating that Soviet psychiatrists would welcome constructive discussion, and suggested a forum at the next World Conference of WASP to be convened in London in November 1988, where a key topic might be ‘Global issues in social psychiatry’, with active participation by Eastern Bloc socialist countries.

Finally, he put in a plea, in the words of Voltaire: “I may disapprove of what you say, but I defend to