Public health concerns as more turn to ‘tan jabs’

Editorial: Use of melanotan I and II in the general population, BMJ Online

Increasing numbers are risking their health just because they want to have a tan, say researchers in an editorial published on bmj.com today.

The authors, led by Michael Evans-Brown from the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University, argue that while the actual number of people having ‘tan jabs’ (the drugs Melanotan I and Melanotan II) is unknown it is easily available via the internet and in some tanning salons and hairdressers. A thriving online community of users exist, the largest of which is Melanotan.org with over 5000 members.

Evans-Brown fears that people using the ‘tan jab’ are putting their health at risk. He says: “serious concerns exist about the quality of the preparations that are currently available – not only the drug content and dose, but also contaminants and sterility. Some users, especially those who are injecting drugs for the first time, are reusing or sharing injecting equipment, which places them and others at risk of infections, including blood borne viruses.”

While small clinical trials have so far only linked melanotans to facial flushing, nausea and vomiting, one of the greatest concerns, say the authors, is that the drugs may interact with how the body functions, especially given that people who want to maintain a tan will be using it for a long time.

There are two types of Melanotan that are likely to be used more and more by the general population, says the editorial. Both melanotan I and melanotan II tan the skin, with melanotan II also causing penile erections and increases in sexual desire.

The authors argue that health professionals need to respond to this growing trend by warning patients about the dangers of using illicitly supplied drugs as well as reporting any adverse reactions. In conclusion, Evans-Brown says that this issue will not go away given that society’s appetite for drugs for lifestyle reasons appears to be “insatiable.”

To view the full article, log onto http://www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.b566

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