

'Whippits': nitrous oxide gas inhalation as recreational drug use

Sir,

These small steel gas canisters (*Figure 1*) are frequently seen on the side of roads and in public areas. They are known as 'whippits' as their intended use is in dispensing whipped cream. Each whippit contains 8 g of nitrous oxide ('laughing gas') and they can be purchased for less than £1 each.

Nitrous oxide gas is the fourth most common recreational drug used in the UK after cannabis, MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine)

and cocaine (Winstock, 2015). The vapourised gas is usually collected in a balloon and then inhaled. Anticipated effects include euphoria, derealisation and mild hallucinations, similar to that experienced using the drug 'ecstasy'.

Excessive use can cause burns to local tissues of the throat, marked bradycardia from vagal stimulation and death as a result of asphyxiation. Chronic use can inactivate vitamin B₁₂ (via the oxidation of cobalt ions in B₁₂) resulting in anaemia and myelopathy.

An acute demyelinating neuropathy, mimicking Guillain-Barré syndrome, can result in permanent disability (Thompson et al, 2015).

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Figure 1. Discarded 'whippits' (nitrous oxide gas canisters), each measuring 6.5 x 1.8 cm.



Thompson AG, Leite MI, Lunn MP, Bennett DLH (2015) Whippits, nitrous oxide and the dangers of legal highs. *Pract Neurol* 15: 207–9 (doi: 10.1136/practneurol-2014-001071)

Winstock AR (2015) The global drug survey 2014 findings. www.globaldrugsurvey.com/the-global-drug-survey-2014-findings/ (accessed 21 June 2016)

Errata

Dr Simon McPherson, Consultant Vascular and Interventional Radiologist in the Department of Radiology, Leeds General Infirmary, The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Leeds, was accidentally omitted as the third author of the article *Improving the care of patients with gastrointestinal bleeding* (vol 77(6), 2016, p. 322, doi: 10.12968/hmed.2016.77.6.322) on submission to the journal.

Dr Peter Odor should have been listed as Clinical Fellow in Perioperative Medicine in the article *Harnessing the power of networks: the future of perioperative research* (vol 77(6), 2016, p. 320, doi: 10.12968/hmed.2016.77.6.320).

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