

Chloral Hydrate

Introduction

One of the earliest known sedatives, chloral hydrate has developed a reputation over the years as a useful end of life drug. Its continued availability (often requiring a medical prescription) has led to a number of questions on Exit Forums about the drug's usefulness as an agent for a peaceful and reliable death). This information is summarised here.

The drug was first synthesised in 1832 by chlorinating alcohol in acid and shortly after this the drug's sedative properties were realised. Its solubility in alcohol saw it being used as an early form of 'knockout drops' or date-rape drug. The drug's infamous use as the so called Micky Finn in Chicago's Lone Star Saloon in the early 1900s drew attention to its possible use as a drug to peacefully end life.

Chloral Hydrate still finds some use as a pre-operative sedative agent, often used in paediatrics, as a means of settling the child before surgical or dental procedure. It is marketed as a syrup, usually in the concentration of 100mg/ ml, or as gelatine capsules

Chloral Hydrate

In the 200ml bottle shown, there would be 20gm of chloral hydrate. Purchase of the drug in most countries is restricted by prescription. Home manufacture of chloral hydrate is however relatively easy.

The lethal dose of chloral hydrate is subject to some debate, but generally 0.25gm/Kgm is the figure quoted. This means that for an 80Kg individual, a full bottle of the syrup shown would need to be drunk, something that would seem impractical. However, the solubility of the drug in alcohol and the synergistic effect of the alcohol/ chloral hydrate combination does lead some to consider this as a viable option for a peaceful death. Other drugs that can usefully enhance the lethal action of chloral hydrate include the benzodiazepines (such as oxazepam/ serapax).

The sedative effects take place after 15 - 20 minutes post ingestion, death is usually caused by persistent interference with cardiac conduction, cardiac insufficiency associated with arrhythmia and associated cerebral death. Cardiac pacemakers are contraindicated.

Note also, that the drug in more concentrated forms causes irritation to the lining of the oesophagus and stomach, irritation that can lead to vomiting, scarring, even perforation. Dilute forms of the drug are preferable, but this of course pushes up the volume that needs to be drunk. If capsules are used, water should be drunk beforehand.

Legal comment

In Australia, Chloral Hydrate is a Schedule 4 prescription-only medication that can be imported legally in certain circumstances.

In the UK, Chloral Hydrate, like Insulin, is not listed as a controlled drug and can be legally imported in no more than a 3 month's supply so long as it is for personal use only.

In the US, Chloral Hydrate is a Schedule IV controlled substance. The penalty for the unlawful importation of Chloral Hydrate is up to five years imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.



Fig 15.1: 200ml bottle of Chloral Hydrate syrup (1gm/10ml)

Chloral Hydrate

Conclusion

While there are much better oral drug options available, if you do elect to use this drug, ensure that you have sufficient (dilute) quantity (>20gm). Also, take an anti-emetic like metoclopramide 40 minutes before the chloral hydrate. The drug needs to be taken with alcohol, along with other potentiators such as benzodiazepines.

The RP Test for Chloral Hydrate

Chloral Hydrate has a questionable reputation in the major indices of reliability and peacefulness, and scores poorly at 60%.

Criteria	Score
<i>Reliability</i>	<i>5/10</i>
<i>Peacefulness</i>	<i>5/10</i>
<i>Availability</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Preparation</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Undetectability</i>	<i>2/5</i>
<i>Speed</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Safety</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Storage</i>	<i>4/5</i>
Total	30 (60%)